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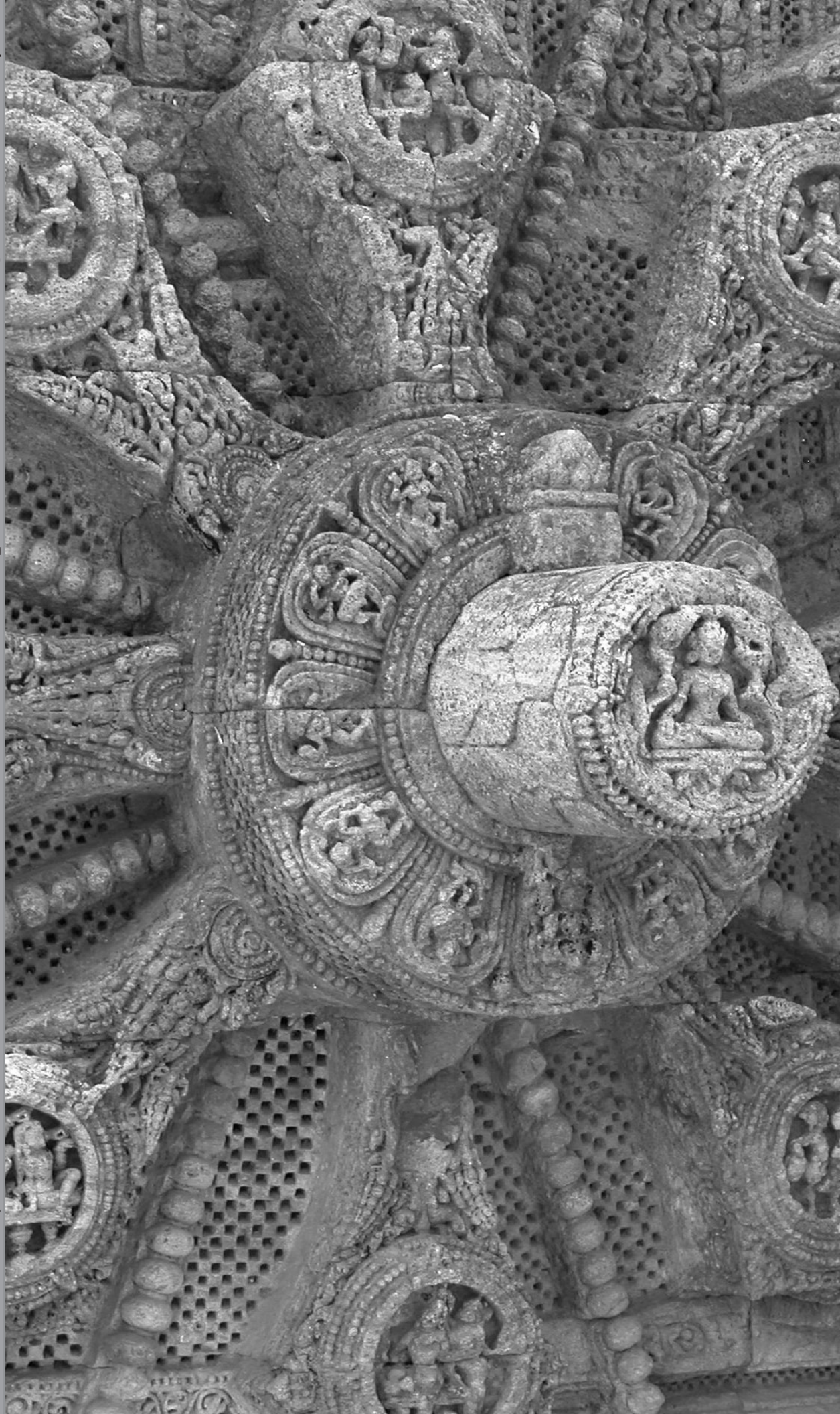
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The Quarterly Journal of Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship

Winter 2004 • Issue No. 27



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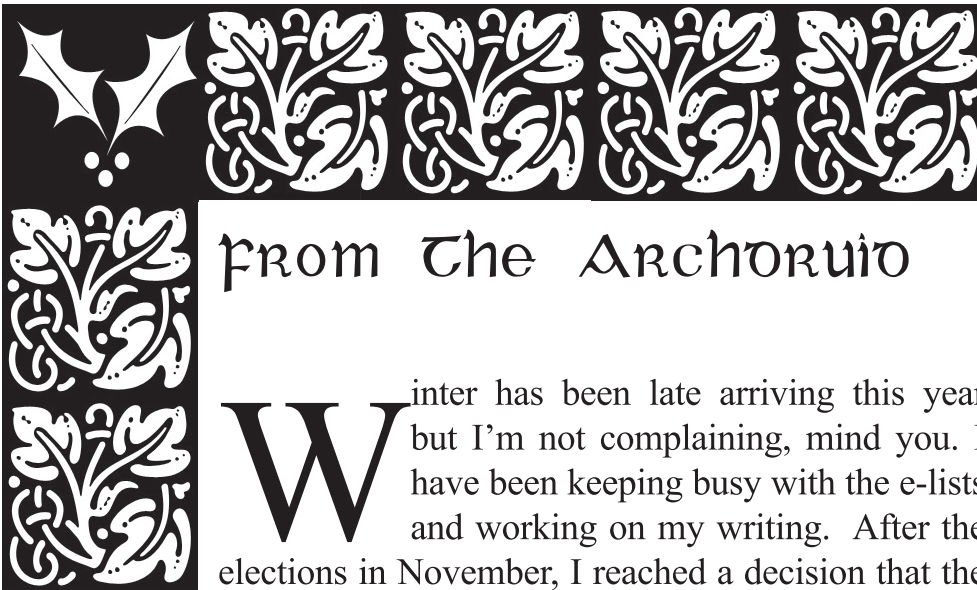
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from The ARCHDRUID

Winter has been late arriving this year but I'm not complaining, mind you. I have been keeping busy with the e-lists and working on my writing. After the elections in November, I reached a decision that the voice of the NeoPagans in the US needed to be heard by the mainstream candidates. To make that happen, I have started the work of forming a NeoPagan PAC (Political Action Committee). That work is progressing well and we should be accepting donations that will be used to work for NeoPagan issues very soon. More information on it can be found at the Yahoo group located at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NeoPaganPAC/>.

ADF's membership numbers continue to grow, and as of the beginning of December, we have about 870 members and 46 Groves and Protogroves. Our rate of growth is increasing and I believe that it is due to the better care that members are receiving in all areas. We have had a few problems getting new Membership Guides and Dedicant Program books printed, but that is straightened out now and things are flowing well.



May the Kindreds bless you all!
Rev. Skip Ellison

American Pagan Prayers

by Ceisivr Serith

What does it mean to be an American Pagan? By this I don't mean a Pagan who happens to be an American, or an American who happens to be a Pagan. I'm talking about someone who practices a form of Paganism that derives from American ideals and culture, and in turn affects how we view and manifest them. Under this conception, American Paganism would be somewhat like the ancient Paganisms of individual ethnic groups – Roman Paganism reflecting Roman ideals, Celtic Paganism reflecting Celtic ideals, etc.

The development of an American Paganism will be both easy and difficult. It will be easy since many of our deities are already established and represented in civil art – Liberty, Justice, etc. Those we may need to flesh out the pantheon, or to apply to specific situations, are easily “invented” – Democracy, Commerce, etc. I put “invented” in quotation marks to indicate that this is what many Pagan cultures did. This was especially the case in Rome, which provided much of the inspiration for American government and imagery. The Romans easily deified abstract ideals, such as Peace, erecting altars and temples to them, and establishing days in the religious calendar devoted to them. This practice is found in early American civic art, where we find not only such obvious deity images as the Statue of Liberty and Justice, but even more abstract deities, such as the Majesty of Law and the Power of Government, which guard the Bill of Rights over the head of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

The Ancestors, such as the Founders, would play an important role, as is obvious from the many monuments to them. Land Spirits would have essentially the same status as they currently do in ADF.

A ritual calendar already exists – Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, etc., – as do rituals – parades, speeches, fireworks, etc. Not only



could these be adapted for use by Pagans, those that are already celebrated by the public at large could be imbued with religious meaning by American Pagans attending them.

The biggest difficulty is that if American Paganism is based on American ideals, then what do we do about the American ideal of the Separation of Church and State? We also have to bear in mind that those who expressed American ideals saw the abstractions as just that, not as actual deities. What will it mean to view them as deities? And if we are attending civic ceremonies being celebrated by civic authorities and attended primarily by non-Pagans, what does that mean? Is it that we know what they really mean, not only leading to an attitude of superiority, but adding to the difficulty of dealing with the Separation of Church and State? These questions and others will have to be dealt with in the development of an American Paganism.

When the Kin system was created, an American SIG was

formed to discuss these. It might seem odd for ADF, which concentrates on Indo-European Paganism, to include an American Paganism. Since “Indo-European” is properly a linguistic term, however, and since the major languages of the United States are Indo-European, America is by definition Indo-European. If we can say, to whatever extent, that there are Pagan principles which exist in the ideals of the American ideology, an American form of Paganism therefore falls within the bounds of ADF.

American Paganism is a work in progress. Much of this is being discussed on the ADF American SIG list, and much of what I’ve said so far comes from the members of that list.

Since I’m a liturgist, I’d like, as part of doing my piece in the work, to present some prayers to some American deities, ancestors, and land spirits. I hope they inspire others to join the project.

To Justice

Not content with your blindfold’s shield
you avert your eyes from the scales by which you separate
the false from the true,
and even with your unseeing eyes the sword you carry
will not miss,
separating the just from the unjust.
May all my deeds,
on this and other days,
be weighed as true
that I might be able to meet your piercing non-gaze with-
out fear.

To Providence

The founding deities,
Liberty, Justice, Democracy, and the others,
are continually unfolded by us into a country more and
more in accord with their teachings.
Liberty denied to blacks began to be extended to them
with the abolition of slavery,
Justice denied to the poor began to be extended to them
with the establishment of Public Defenders,
Democracy denied to women began to be extended to
them by the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment,
so that our imperfect system grows closer and closer to
the deities’ perfection.

These changes are created by human beings,
but they do this as they apprehend more and more the
implications of the self-evident truths on which America
was founded.

This apprehension is itself the result of human effort,
but its inevitability and development in time,
so that each new perception of truth might be absorbed in
preparation for the next,
are in the care of Providence, the deity which keeps us
under its special protection,
and provides the means through which the other
deities might perform their work.

This deity is hard to know, since it is one of knowing,
and how can one know the knower?

Indeed, whether Providence is a god or a goddess is
not even known.

We represent it in symbols that depict this mystery
even as they depict Providence.

We show it in the Great Seal as the Eye and the
Pyramid:

the Eye which watches us,
and the unfinished Pyramid of the American ideals.

We pray to Providence today, then,
that our sight might be clear, to see the founding prin-
ciples better,
and that we might find the strength to climb the Pyramid
again and again,
carrying more blocks of stones, to place them there,
strongly cementing them with mortar.

Providence asks us not for offerings of things, but of
words that inspire,
ideals in our hearts,
and the continuing effort to defend and protect the found-
ing ideas.

Our vow today, then, is not to erect a stone altar, but one
that is formed of all that is right and good,
and conducive to the extension of the Self-Evident Truths
to all,
and not just to those who pray here.

And for that we ask strength and knowledge and wis-
dom,
and most of all courage:

May we both know the right and do it.

To Liberty

Many and great are the gifts Liberty brings.
Many and great are the forms in which she comes to us.

We praise her in all of them.
Liberty of the Harbor,
may your flame shine to light the whole world.
Armed Freedom,
may you watch over our government.
Walking Liberty,
may it be the rising sun of prosperity from which you
stride.
Libertas!
Liberté!
Liberty!
We remember you in all of your forms
and worship you in all of the ways you show yourself to
us.

Here today I would like to invoke the sacred name of
Liberty.
It was for Liberty that our ancestors fought.
It was with her inspiration that they created our Constitu-
tion.
It was with her guidance that they formed a nation.
It is for her continuing inspiration that I pray today.
The Founders had a vision:
a land fit for Liberty to dwell in.
Under her guidance we will make that dream real.

Liberty

Our Representatives and Senators,
Our President,
Our Supreme Court,
only hold their offices to make you known.
Make this known to them,
so that knowing you they will be inspired to your service.

To the Abstract Deities

Industry, you have made us strong.
Commerce, you have made us rich.
Agriculture, you have fed us well.
Commerce, you have joined us together.
War, you have defended our freedom.
Peace, you have given us something to defend.
Justice, you have enabled us to deserve all these.
Liberty: with these we have built a home for you,
and we ask you to come live with us,
continually reminding us of your gifts and your demands.

To Democracy

It's not your hands I'm voting with, Democracy,
so don't let anyone try to tell you that.
I mean, really, what would be the point?
If my vote isn't independently given it's not under your
blessing.
It's only when I don't ask you how to vote that I can really
honor you.
Freedom is your worship.

To the Deities of the Oath

President, Chief Executive, Commander-in-Chief:
you have sworn to protect and defend the Constitution.
Gods and Goddesses of the Oath:
don't let him forget this.
And if he does, torment his dreams,
compelling him to return to his vow.

To the Sounding Sather and Framers of the Constitution

It might be that your blood doesn't flow through my
veins,
but your ideas flow through my mind.
Founders and Framers,
each day may I think of them,
and each day work to bring them into being.

To the Early Immigrants

On an incomprehensibly vast ocean
To an unknowably deep land;
Trusting to wood and rope and cloth,
and fickle winds,
you came from a need to live as you thought right.
Though I do not like all you did,
and though you would not like all I do,
still like calls to like.
The fire in my heart is yours.
Against obstacles you prevailed,
afraid below decks while storms shook the boat, you car-
ried on.
If I, like you, set my self only to the right as I see it,
without the storms destroying my resolve,

I will consider myself truly your descendant.
As like calls to like, as fire to fire,
be with me and give me courage as needed.

To the Land Spirits

Spirits of plants and animals,
of water and stone;

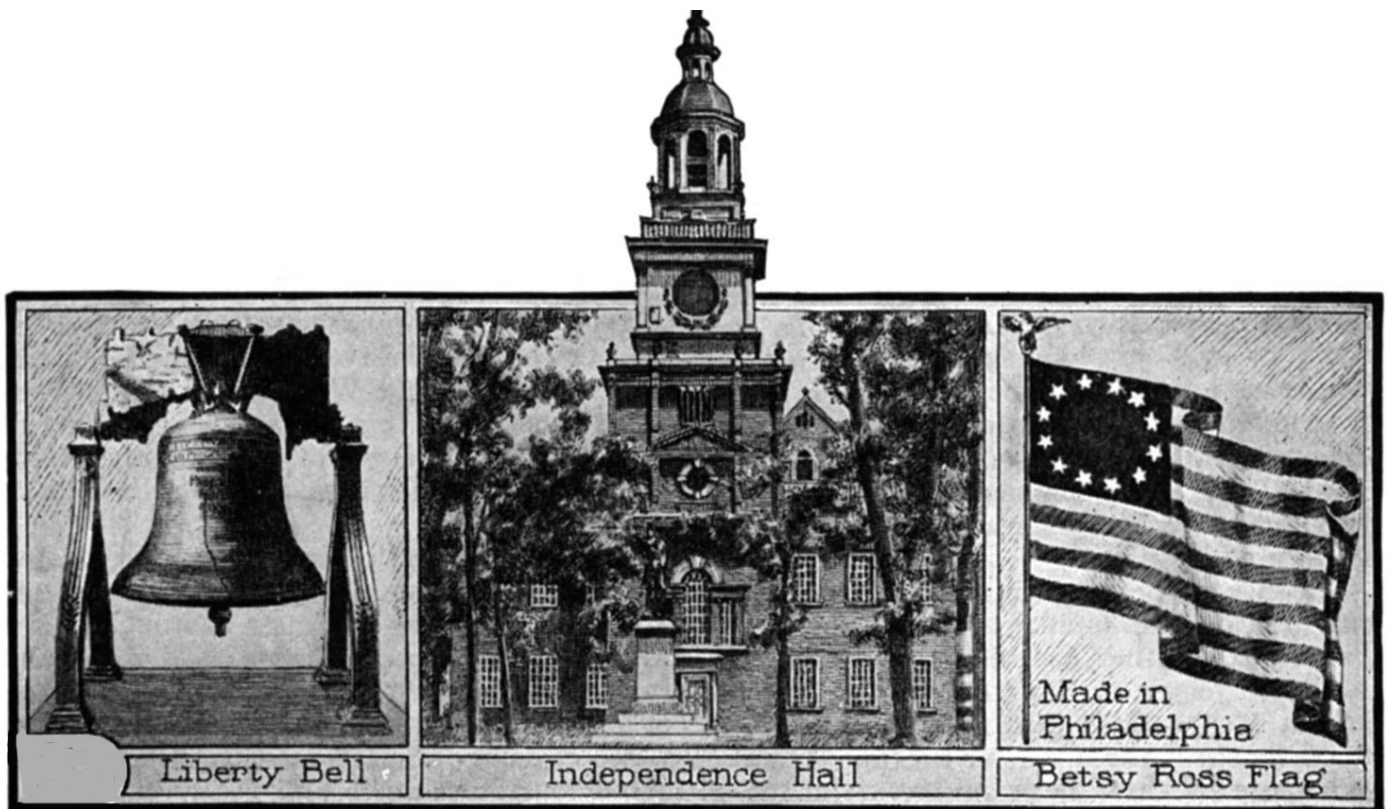
All the Spirits of this land:
Our ancestors weren't kind to your ancestors when they
came to this land.
Today, hear our words,
taste our offerings,
so we might begin a new relationship with you,
a few small steps on the road to trust.



American SIG

The purposes of the American SIG are, in no particular order: to discuss American culture as an IE hearth culture within ADF, to discuss the impact and implications of American culture on those focusing on other hearth cultures within ADF, to discuss the possible existence and makeup of an American Pantheon(s), and to discuss the feasibility or lack thereof of a potential American Kin(s) as our ideas of an American hearth culture develop.

For more information, you can subscribe to the group's e-mail list ADF-American using the subscription page , or you can contact the SIG coordinator Karen Dutton directly at kdutton@carolina.rr.com





Meditation And The Type-A Personality

by Jennifer Hunt

Hi, my name is Jenni, and I am a multitasker.

A few years ago when I was struggling to get through the meditation requirement for the Dedicant's Program, you might have seen me on any given morning sitting uncomfortably before my contrived altar, eyes squinted closed, trying not to think about the zillion things I had to do that day, focused on growing roots out of my posterior and having a star beam blaze a path into my brain. Now that I'm a Dedicant Priest and my teacher insists that I meditate for a minimum of three minutes a day – every day – you might see me literally sitting on my hands, eyes closed, and furrows in my brows as I try to focus on “the now.” Meditation has never ceased being a struggle for me. So just as I struggled with Algebra but found I made a pretty good Algebra tutor, I figured it might help some folks who also struggle with meditation if I shared some of my experiences.



“I can feel the cool, clean earth lapping at my roots... did I remember to file my taxes?”

I used to always worry that I just wasn't any good at meditation and I'd never get it. I have trouble sitting still for any period of time; my feet go to sleep if I sat in a lotus position for more than two or three minutes; my mind drifts everywhere; I have a hard time even keeping my eyes closed. Meditation feels like a chore or a punishment – like when my mother used to punish me by sitting me on a stool in the corner and setting the timer for 10 minutes. Torture! Sometimes I despair of ever being able to meditate properly. That is, until I realized the only way for me to meditate “properly” is to do so in a way that works for ME.

One day, while I was still working on my own DP, a friend pointed out to me that I can always meditate when the situation calls for it – particularly in ritual. I can be in trance mode almost as fast as you can say “ground and center.”

Ergo, she reasoned, I must be getting practice somewhere. Maybe I was practicing in ways I didn't consciously deem meditation? Eureka! I practice meditation when I am doing something else that does not require the complete focus of my mind but I can't do anything else simultaneously. How typical of me! Why would I ever do one thing at a time when I could be doing three or four?

Since then, I've identified two discernable types of trance and meditation that I use regularly: The first involves focusing on nothing in particular and getting lost in the nothingness (or, as I prefer to think of it, “zoning out”). With the second, I focus on one thing and get totally wrapped up in it. Like so many other learning experiences in my life, I found I really could do what everyone else seemed to find so easy to do – I just went about it in a different way.

Mindfulness: Contemplating Nothing

Focusing on nothing was a task which daunted me for years until I discovered that I do so all the time, and I suspect everyone else does, too, with some frequency. The best example for me is while I am driving for a long period of time on a route that requires little attention. When I find myself on such a drive, I go into a sort of attentive trance, not consciously directing my thoughts, but allowing them to mill around in my head, sorting themselves out almost of their own volition. Now I certainly don't recommend anyone take up meditation while driving, but anyone can reach a contemplative state while driving. I've discovered a huge benefit in doing so as I'm one of those rare persons who doesn't succumb to road rage. I'm not so involved in my driving that I ever get upset about it - - my mind is only partially occupied with driving, and I'm very relaxed.

There are certainly lots of other opportunities for "zoning out" – the bathtub zone, the front-porch-at-dusk zone, the commuter-train zone, the trance-music zone, etc. (I'm sure folks can come up with dozens of other examples.) It's not so much what you're doing as the fact that you're really doing nothing that makes the time so valuable. The point is that you are a captive audience to "the now." Thoughts and sensations drift in and out of your consciousness just as much as necessary, though you don't necessarily get bogged down in any of them. I find that all those thoughts and sensations tend to sort themselves out and prioritize themselves naturally. As I sit on the front porch, I notice the neighbor's music for only a moment; it's the song of the bullfrog in the pond across the street that comes to the forefront, probably because that song has something to tell me, not the neighbor's stereo. Of course, on rare occasions, I get so lost in the moment that I neither hear, feel, see, smell nor perceive ANYTHING. I treasure those moments most of all.

I really miss smoke breaks. They don't work for me without the cigarettes; I just don't relax. I used to sit outside on the back steps listening to the birds, tasting the air on the wind, and generally tuning into the world around me. I prefer to think of this kind of meditation as a "mindfulness" exercise, rather than focusing on nothingness. It simply involves relaxing and opening up my mind and senses to be totally receptive. Often I do this sort of meditation immediately after prayer, because I think an

important part of prayer is listening. Sometimes, these meditations just quiet my mind. Sometimes they lead to contemplation of all sorts of things: daydreaming about my future, thinking about my ancestors, working out the outline of a story or essay I plan to write, or planning work and rituals for my grove. Sometimes what I experience I can only describe as epiphany. At such times, I've written some of my best poetry. Sometimes it simply brings great, joyful tears to my eyes. I daresay that these meditations are some of the most fruitful and satisfying meditations of all.

I used to experience another less spectacular instance of this focused meditative trance when I would type from dictation or copy. Typing from long tapes of dictation or pages and pages of boring copy can be very relaxing. I used to get so deeply involved in the task at hand that my mind would be totally open and empty, not thinking at all about what the document says, and no effort whatsoever into the kinetics of my fingers on the keyboard or my foot on the dictaphone pedal. I could just close my eyes and shift into a sort of clerical cruise control, unable to see, hear, or smell anything around me – pretty much off in another world. This is as close as I ever come to being so involved in a trance that I think of "nothingness," yet ironically, it is while I am totally focused on a single task, simple and automatic as it is for me.

Immersion: Contemplating Everything

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We are all inextricably connected to each other and to that which surrounds us. By consciously focusing on the connections we have with the world around us and joining our essence with the 'All,' we become more than just ourselves – we become a part of our community, our environment, and our universe. I refer to this type of meditation as "immersion," because it involves surrendering one's individual consciousness to become absorbed in the Whole.

For me, the most powerful of these meditations occur in ritual, when my mind becomes so tuned into what unfolds before me that often I'm not aware of anything but the ritual and its participants – the Kindred, the Community, and the Earth – in a way that excludes perception of so-called mundane reality – people joining the ritual late, traffic sounds, or the airplane passing overhead. Because the Universe is a dynamic and mutable force, immersion

meditation is not something one would do quietly or sitting still. It requires – by definition – active participation.

My favorite form of immersion meditation involves listening to music and singing and/or dancing along with it. My soul has always spoken and understood the language of music more so than any other form of communication. Sometimes I listen carefully to discern the different instruments or voices in music which create the whole, but more often, I listen more holistically and feel the music as an aching, soaring catharsis deep within me – I see, hear, smell, and feel nothing else but the music. It is the most uplifting, exhilarating type of meditation I know.

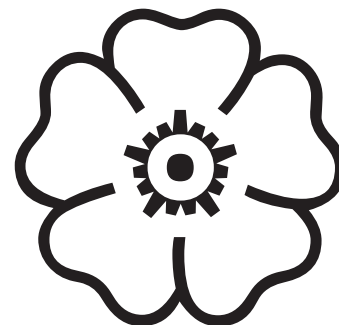
I once attended a zikr workshop sponsored by the Sufi folks in Columbus, Ohio. This type of meditation opened entire worlds of consciousness to me. The zikr is a form of meditative trance which involves some sort of movement and chant. Whirling dervishes are the most readily recognized users of this type of trance and meditation. One of the simpler zikrs I remember involves a group of people sitting around in a circle, each in a half-lotus or lotus position, knees almost touching the persons adjacent. The chant was an exaggeratedly aspirated “hhhhoo,” and the movement simply turning one’s head from side to side. The idea was to imagine the essence of your soul concentrated in your breath and passing it with the syllable “hoo” to the center core of the soul of the person to either side of you. After maybe ten minutes of this exercise (it is difficult to have any sense of time during zikrs), the souls of every person in the circle had been passed around and shared, and we were all the stronger and refreshed (these being totally inadequate adjectives) for having shared them thus.

Sometimes I do consciously involve myself in a more guided, spiritual meditation. Instead of the Two Powers, I imagine a small, but powerful flame deep inside the core of me expanding, diffusing, and spreading around me like an aura. I especially like to do this when I am driving in heavy traffic where other drivers seem to be particularly impatient and grumpy. I focus first on myself and my breathing, calming and relaxing myself. Then I allow those feelings of calmness and well-being influence those around me. It really does seem to work to help relieve tension in the drivers around me!

Finally, I want to describe one last form of immersion meditation I use when I am walking or exercising. It involves matching the rhythms of my body with my movements and with any external rhythms I perceive. When I was younger – and could still jog comfortably without feeling like every step was jolting my body to pieces – I would always use a specific song in my mind to pace myself -- ELO’s “Evil Woman” was one of my favorites for a long, steady, sustained run. Nowadays, when I swim, I find a stroke which suits the rhythm of a particular song and set the pace of my stroke and breathe to that beat. My favorite workout is on the elliptical machine while wearing headphones and a lively CD playing. I love the music SO much, that I can’t help matching its rhythm. I’ve found my heart rate is lower when I work out to music, time goes faster, I have more energy, less soreness... and oh, when those endorphins kick in! I get so lost in the movement and the music, I totally lose track of time and all conscious thought whatsoever.

These methods of meditation are what have worked best for me, and I found them as a process of experimentation, elimination and back-door contemplation. Whether you’re just learning to meditate or have done so for years, find a method of meditation that works best for you. Try the Two Powers meditation – honestly, open-mindedly and over enough time to really give it a chance – before you do anything else. It is a terrific starting point, and for many folks, one of the best meditation techniques there is. (If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!) If you find it really isn’t your bag, take the time to contemplate why that is. (Find out what’s broke and fix it!) Try different techniques, and if necessary, tweak them out until you have something that’s custom-made for you.

Hey, if I can do it, anyone can.





A Dedicant's Oath

by Linda Costello

Begin by leaving an offering of ale for the outdwellers while saying:

Outdwellers, those of you who do not support my ways, I offer you ale to stay here at this time.

Ring Bell 3X3

Nature Spirits, Ancestors, Shining Ones. I will meet you at the boundaries when the gates are opened.

Kneel and kiss the ground and say:

Earth Mother, I honor you.

Walk over to the fire pit, and light a small fire.

I light my fire upon your bosom.

Stand in center of circle

Taliesin, I pray to ever hear the Awen of thy soul.

Close eyes and do brief two powers meditation, feeling the connection between the earth and sky flowing through me.

I, Linda Costello, come to make my oath of dedication to the path of the old wisdom. I come with offerings of worship for my beloved gods and goddesses, for my dear ancestors, and for the nature spirits that I so cherish. Most especially, I bring offerings to Manannan, the gatekeeper at the boundaries, the King of the Sidhe, that he will bear witness to my oath and continue to guide and ward me on my path.

As the ancient ones did before me, so do I now. May the kindred hear, and look kindly upon me as I make my oath.

Sing:

Gods and Dead and Mighty Sidhe, Powers of earth & sky & sea.

By fire and well, by sacred tree, Offering I make to ye.

Go to the Well

I offer this ring of silver to the well, dedicating myself to welcome the powers of the unformed, as these are the roots of my creativity.

Go to the Fire

I offer these sweet herbs, which I grew in my garden, as a dedication to the ordering powers. May the fire ever make sense out of my chaos, burning away the dross to find the burning kernel of inspiration within.

Go to the Tree

I offer this wind chime to the Tree as a dedication to the music that is made when the powers of the land and the powers of the sky come together. May they ever sing within my soul with beauty.

Stand in center and sing Manannan chant as I slowly turn counterclockwise:

Manannan open the portals
Between the gods and mortals
Power freely flows
As our magic grows.

Speak: May the gates be open.

Walk to the well

Ancestors, kin of blood and kin of heart,
I honor you.

I ask you to hear my oath and to watch my footsteps as I travel the path of the Druid.

Ancestors, accept my offering.

Pour ale next to the well

Walk to the tree

Nature Spirits, dear friends of stone and sea, of fin and feather and fur, of leaf and root and shoot, I honor you and I welcome you. Please hear my oath and open the way for me as I walk the way of the Earth.

Nature spirits, accept my offering

Sprinkle herbs around the base of the tree

Walk to the fire

Shining Ones, known and unknown deities, gods and goddesses who watch over my very soul, I honor you. I ask you to hear my voice as I make my dedication to your shining spirit. Please empower me as I walk the path of

divine magic, the path of the Druid, doing your will in the world. Shining Ones, accept my offering.

Sing:

Hail all the gods. Hail all the goddesses.
Hail all the holy ones that I've brought together
Powers of the sky, Powers of the sacred earth,
Powers of the underworld, I've brought together
Hail all the gods. Hail all the goddesses.
Hail all the gods and goddesses.

Invoke Manannan by saying:

Manannan, my dearest One. You have danced with me at the boundary between this world and the other worlds. You have held my hand and shown me sights I never would have known without you. You have whispered wisdoms in my ear. Manannan, oh King of the Sidhe, playful trickster, Lord of the ways and the waves, Cross your mists and come to me now with your crane bag. Flood this place with your magic and your warding ways. My Lord Manannan, accept my offering.

Offer apples to the fire and ale to the well.

It's now time for me to swear before you all, the Shining Ones, the Ancestors, and the Nature Spirits, and you, my lord Manannan, my dedication to this path.

I, Linda Costello, do make oath to all you kindred of my intent to follow the path of the Druids, knowing this is the true and right path for me. I offer myself in pure dedication to the ways of the earth, to the ways of the ancient ones, to the ways of divine magic. I offer myself in devoted service as I am called, to be what you need me to be to further awareness of our ways in the world. I offer you my life to do with as you will, in utmost love and utmost respect and utmost sincerity.

As a token of my dedication, I offer my blood to the land,

Use lancet to pierce finger and squeeze a drop of blood onto the ground.

And my hair to the sky.

Cut off a piece of hair and loose it into the air.

And my saliva to the sea

Spit on the ground.

Noble ones, mighty ones, Shining ones, accept my offerings and my oath.

Dearest Kindred, in exchange for that which I offer, what blessings do you bestow upon me at this time?

Draw 3 cards from Pennick's Tree Oracle as my omen and interpret the reading.

Sit in meditation of the message for a few minutes.

Take the three charged stones and place them, one by one, with my left hand, in a glass of mead held in my right hand, while saying:

Ancient and mighty ones, I have honored you this day. I pray you honor me in turn, as a gift calls for a gift. I thirst for the waters of wisdom. I open my heart to you, and pray that you bless these waters.

(Obsidian) May the dark waters of chaos arise in me. May the Mother grant me wisdom, love, and power.

(Crystal) May the ordering light of the heavens shine through me. May the Father fire grant me wisdom, love, and power.

(Purple and white stone) In these waters, the two powers meet. May Manannan know me, and open the gates of the Between in my heart. May he grant me wisdom, love, and power.

Hallow these waters, I pray. Bless my spirit and my life, and keep me ever close. Behold the waters of life.

Drink of the waters in contemplation, then hold the ring of dedication in my left hand, and pour the waters of life over it, saying:

By the might of the waters and the light of the sky, by the three kindred in the three worlds do I bless this token. May it ever be a reminder of the oath I have sworn this day. Let the blessings of the powers shine and flow, kindling wisdom, love, and power in my spirit. So be it.

Put on the ring, and allow a power song to come through.

Nature spirits, Ancestors, Shining Ones, Manannan, In gratitude for your blessings and support, I thank you.

May the gates be closed. So be it.



Agnihotr

by Narabali Agnayi

The *agnihotr* was a very important ritual performed in Vedic times. Due to thousands of years of corruption, we can only hope to scratch the surface of this historically confusing ritual. We do know that it was very important because of its personal nature: it could be performed by anyone and was not tied to being performed by a *Brahmin*.

The following information was taken from various sources (see the bibliography) and hopes to spread some light on the deceptively simplistic *agnihotr* ritual.

Story Of The Agnihotr

There was a time when there was no earth. There was no sky above it and no heaven beyond that. There was no light or separation of light from the darkness. There was no day. There was no night. Man did not exist in this void. Neither did the *Devas* (Gods). There was only chaos, darkness and Prajapati.

Prajapati became filled with desire. He sought to create, to fill the void with forms. He took to performing austerely, filling the void with himself. After some time he produced the Devourer, Agni, from his mouth. After this all of the other Gods, too, were created and they fled to the corners of the world. Only Agni remained.

“The Devourer shall wish to eat,” thought Prajapati. “As nothing else is here, will he eat me?”

The Devourer looked to Prajapati with his mouth wide.

Prajapati stood in fear. His greatness left him. His speech left him.

“Offer an oblation,” said his inner voice.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead and saying “Svaha” he offered it to the Devourer. He offered his own eye, truth, and said “In Agni is the light, the light is in Agni.”

This offering to Agni was the first oblation to the fire. Its name is *agnihotr*.

Religious Texts Of The Agnihotr

The *agnihotr* appears in the *Kathakasambhita* (*Black Yajurveda*), *Maitrayaisambhita* (*Black Yajurveda*), *Taittiriya Brahmana* (*Black Yajurveda*), *Aitareya Brahmana* (*Rgveda*), *Sankhya Brahmana*

(*Rgveda*), *Satapath Brahmana* (*White Yajurveda*), *Jaiminiya Brahmana* (*Samaveda*), *Sadvimsa Brahmana* (*Samaveda*), *Gopatha Brahmana* (*Atharvaveda*), *Vadbulasutra* and traces of it can be found within the *Grhya Sutras*. The *agnihotr* can also be found in sources which mention the *pranagnihotra*, an *agnihotr* substitute.

As we touched upon the history of the various Vedic texts in a previous issue of Oak Leaves (see the article “Why Vedism?” in Oak Leaves issue 25) I shall briefly run through the source material.

The holy texts are split into two categories: *sruti*-tradition and *smrti*-tradition. The *sruti* sources are ones that have been “heard.” These texts were revealed by the Gods to specific Rsis (priests). The *smrti* sources are those that have been “memorized,” and as such have been created by man without divine assistance.

The Vedic texts fall mostly within the category of *sruti* and are known as Vedas and portions of the Upanisads. Veda translates literally into “knowledge.” The word *veda* is derived from the verb *vid-* which means “to know, to be aware of.” *Upanisad* is broken up with “sad” meaning “sit” and most likely refers to the extreme secrecy that was to be enforced with the sharing of the Upanisads by having the student sitting beside the teacher. The thinking is the word *upanisad* refers to “secret text.”

There are a total of four Vedas. Three of the Vedas, the *Rgveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Samaveda*, can be dated to between 1500-1200BCE. A fourth Veda -- the *Atharvaveda* was established slightly later, between 1200-1000BCE. Each Veda consists of its the main text, or *Sambhita*, as well as dedicated commentary and instruction on that text, which is known as the *Brahmana*. The *Sambhitas* are the actual text, or hymns, of each of the Vedas while the *Brahmanas* are the commentary upon the Vedas. The *Brahmanas* set out to explain, in detail, the going-ons of the Vedas.

The Upanisads generally date from about 800-600BCE and while they show more information on the Vedas, they also show a breaking away from traditional Vedic thought into the basic tenets of what would grow to become Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism). The Upanisads are predominantly thought processes and commentary. They can be seen as a mix of *smrti* and *sruti* for the most part.

Past these texts you find yourself within the man made texts of the *smrti*-tradition. While this in no way demeans their value, it simply must be stated that to a Vedic these

texts are man made texts that have been quite removed from their original Vedic thought process. These texts often incorrectly portray the Vedic texts for their own agendas.

Two *smṛti*-tradition texts which are still of great use: the *Grhya Sūtras* and the *Crauta Sūtras*. The *Sūtras* were roughly set down between 400 and 200BCE, although this is just scholastic guess work. The *Grhya Sūtras* deal specifically with household ritual to be performed by the householder. The *Crauta Sūtras* depict elaborate rituals which included one or more clergy.

Mythology Of The Agnihotr

The *agnihotr* starts with the creation myths of Prajapati, a God who was being formed at the end of the Rgvedic period and is much spoken of in the *Atharvaveda* and *Vajasaneyisambhita*. Nowhere in the *Rgveda* is Prajapati given his creation myth. Rather within the *Rgveda* his name occurs twice as an alias for Savitar and Soma, respectively, and in addition his name occurs four more times as a God unto himself.

Within the additional *Sambhitas* and *Brahmanas* there are several versions and additions to the Prajapati creation myth. These myths can be broken down to Prajapati creating Agni and then making an offering to him. Versions occur where there is a difference over whether Prajapati gave an offering freely or because he feared Agni; whether Agni erupted from Prajapati's mouth or from his forehead; and whether Prajapati's offering to Agni was his own blood, his own eye, the sun, or his own sweat (*ghee*).

The overwhelming consensus of these particular texts is that Prajapati created the Gods, with Agni being the first creation. From there he made the first offering to the fire (Agni) and thus began the first *agnihotr*. These particular myths are thought to deal with the evening *agnihotr* as they focus in around Agni and Prajapati. Additional myths surround Agni, Surya and Vayu to explain the morning *agnihotr* but do not cover how the *agnihotr* came into being.

Due to Prajapati being formed in conjunction with the *agnihotr* at the end of the Rgvedic period it may be safe to assume that the *agnihotr* held a different meaning before that time. I can find no explanation for a change at this point in time in my research, but by reading through the various texts and watching as the *agnihotr* becomes more difficult and more restrictive I can say clergy corruption most likely played a part.

Agnihotr Explained

“He (Prajapati) offered truth, he offered yonder sun. For that is the symbolic meaning of the agnihotr oblation. He by whom the agnihotr is thus offered becomes more illustrious day by day. Before that time night and day did not exist. They were both created together with that oblation. In that he (the priest or householder) offers in the evening, he thereby makes the sun shine away from here for his adversary. In that he offers at daybreak, he makes it shine to the west for his own benefit. The agnihotr is offered for the sake of preserving Agni. By offering in the evening he keeps Agni for the night, by offering at daybreak he keeps Agni for the day.”

Kathakasambhita 6,1†

There are many explanations for the *agnihotr*, however many are later additions. The ancient Vedics became attached to the *agnihotr* due to the *agnihotr* being performed over time rather than being instituted from the beginning. We shall focus in on the very basic idea of the *agnihotr* being the transferring of the Sun into Agni. This is the core idea behind the *agnihotr*, as supported by the original telling of the first *agnihotr*.

The *agnihotr* is done twice daily with the evening *agnihotr* being the more important of the two. It is thought that by the end of the day the Sun (Surya) has grown tired and is slipping into the dangerous night. The evening *agnihotr* requires the Sun (Surya) to be heated and poured into Agni.

“Surya (the Sun) and Agni were in the same yoni††. Thereupon Surya rose upwards. He lost his seed. Agni received it with an iron receptacle. He made it stick to the iron pan. While it was burning he transferred it to the cow. It became milk. Therefor fresh milk which is still warm, sticks to the untinned iron vessel. When one performs the agnihotr with milk, then one offers yonder sun. For this is the agnihotr.”

Kathakasambhita 6,3:51.9-14†

The morning devotional adds to the Sun's strength by offering more milk.

As you move through the texts you find mentions of symbolic *agnihotrs*. However these do conflict with the strong message that the *agnihotr* is to be performed twice daily. One such example can be found within the *Sankhya-anabrahmana* (2,8):

“This fire offers itself in the rising sun. Yonder sun when it sets, offers itself in the fire at night. The night offers itself in the day, the day in the night. The exhalation offers itself in the inhalation, the inhalation in the exhalation.”†

The above passage continues with an explanation that the very act of breathing within the symbolism can be used as a substitute of the *agnibotr*. This does not appear to be a common practice and seems to be more of a thought process.

In the earliest mentions it is stated that the *agnibotr* is performed in the early morning just before sunrise and in the evening. If one does not complete the *agnibotr* in the evening, his morning *agnibotr* does not matter. It is not until later that a deep discussion on exactly when the *agnibotrs* are to be performed occurs. As with most things surrounding the *agnibotr* there is no clear cut answer, thus we put the *agnibotr* at just before sunrise and just after sunset.

As we have now covered the texts of the *agnibotr*, its myths, the timing and why we perform it we are left with two questions: what do you use to complete an *agnibotr* and how do you do it?

The *agnibotr*, in its most basic form, is a pouring of milk into the fire. This involves just one fire, or three depending on your class, along with a *sthali*, a *havani*, and an *agnibotri* (the cow). A *sthali* is an earthen pot containing milk which has been made by an *Aryan* (Vedic), but not a *Sudra* (non Vedic), and that has not been made with a potter's wheel. By not being made on a wheel it is said the *sthali* becomes sacred to only the Gods. The *havani* is a spoon (or ladle) made of *vikankata* wood and has a handle which is one arm's length.

There is also the kindling-stick, or *samidh*. This stick is made of *palasa* wood and is said to be equal to Soma. Only one stick is used and it represents Prajapati in certain myths within the Brahmanas. The other wood used to create the fire is for the fire only. The kindling stick is used as the means to transport the offering to heaven.

Performing The Agnibotr

The *agnibotr* is performed in the following order:

- Milk the cow
- Tend the fire
- Warm the milk
- Pour (or do not pour) the water

- Remove the milk from the fire
- Offering milk to the Householder Fire
- Offering of milk to the Offertorial Fire

An important issue to discuss is the fasting that is often done with Vedic rituals. There is no fast performed for the *agnibotr*, unlike in other Vedic rituals. Instead it is said that because the *agnibotr* is a never ending ritual there is no fast; however, there is mention that to remain pure when one has sex they should be like the animals: quiet with no talking. It is thought when you have sex in silence you become more pure.

The first step of the *agnibotr* is to milk the cow. As with all the steps in the *agnibotr* you will find many variations and extreme detail as to how every action must be completed.

The cow, known as the *agnibotri*, is milked by a helper of the priest. This helper is to let the calf go towards the cow from the southern side so he may win the favour of the Fathers. He makes the cow turn eastward to win the favour of the Gods. Then he turns the cow to the north to begin milking.

He milks the two front teats if the man he is milking for is the eldest son or prosperous, the back two teats are milked if the man he is milking for is the youngest son or wishes to be prosperous. Another source claims you should milk all four teats as they represent four sacrifices. The milk is to be milked into the *sthali*. Extreme care is to be taken so that no milk is spilled in this process.

The next step surrounds the kindling of the fires. A moment must be spent to explain the Vedic fire system before we continue.

The generic ancient Vedic ritual layout consists of the Householder's Fire (*gaarbapatya*), a seat for the *Yajamana's* wife (the *Yajamana* being the person for who the ritual was being done), the Southern Fire (*daksi-naagni*), the position of the *Hotr*, a seat for the *Yajamana*, the position of the *Brahmin*, the *vedi*, the Offertorial Fire (*aahavaniya*), and the position of the *Udgatr*.

The Householder's Fire is to the west. It is a reflection of the fire that is kept burning in the home at all times. It is often lit with the flames from the Domestic Fire of the *Yajamana*. Failing that it would be lit from the Brahmin's own Domestic Fire, the Assembly Fire or from scratch as practicality dictates.

The Southern Fire is to the south and it is the fire of Yama, King of the Dead, and the Fathers. The Offertorial Fire is to the east and is the fire of the Gods. It is to this fire that offerings are made to go directly to the Gods. This specific fire is layer upon layer of bricks with specific meanings and is formed into the shape of a bird or on a structure in the shape of a bird.

The *vedi* is between the Offertorial Fire and the Householder's Fire. This is shaped as the body of a woman and is the area where all of the ritual tools and offerings are placed. The fires of importance in an *agnihotr* are the *gaarhapatya*, the Householder's Fire, and the *aahavaniya*, the Offertorial Fire.

Fire is taken from the Householder's Fire and placed to the Offertorial Fire. This is to be done at the end of the day. Thus he takes out the negativity of the day and secures the good actions of the day.

The individual is to approach the Offertorial Fire from the east and then he goes around it by passing between the space of it and the Householder's Fire. Then he sits to the south of the Offertorial Fire.

There is also one mention of water being poured in the evening. Water is poured around all three fires, three times. While doing so the sacrificer says "I pour truth round thee, order."† In the morning he does the same but says: "I pour order round thee, truth."† The milk is then put on the Householder's Fire to be cooked. The milk which is to be offered is to be cooked perfectly; not over boiling or being lukewarm. It is cooked over coals taken from the *garhapatya* fire.

The actual milking of the cow is a maze in and of itself. The cow should be milked by a *Brahmin* or a *Sudra* or a man who milks cows. They are to approach the cow from the southern side to win favor of the Fathers. Then the cow is forced eastward to gain the favour of the Gods. The cow is then turned north. The teats should never touch during the milking. The front teats should be milked for the man who is an eldest son or or prosperous. The back teats should be milked if the man is the youngest son or wishes to become prosperous.

If there is no milk available there were optional offerings which could be used. These included *ghee* (clarified butter) or rice-gruel (rice is said to be the seed of the bull and the bull is the Sun, thus the rice is the Sun in the manner milk is the Sun). If the fire cannot be made on time the ear of a female goat is offered (the goat is sacred to Agni); if a goat

cannot be found the offering is made to the right hand of a *Brahmin*; if a *Brahmin* cannot be found the oblation should be made on *kusa* grass; if *kusa* grass cannot be found it should be offered into water.

The pot with the milk is not to be put in the middle of the Householder's Fire as this would condemn the sacrificer's wife to death. He is to push coals to the north of the fire and put the pot on them to protect his wife (the fire is seen as Rudra and the pot the wife).

One source, the *Jaiminiyabrahmana* (*Samaveda*), states that when the coals are pushed out the sacrificer is to say: "Ye are the prosperity bringers. Danger coming from abroad has been pushed away."†

The milk is put on the coals and it is said: "Thou art put on Vaisvanara's fire. May Agni not burn thy lustre. For truth, thee."†

Ghee is to be sprinkled on the milk. This is followed by *kusa* grass being burned, held over the milk and used to warm the milk.

The same source above states that while the milk is being passed over by the *kusa* the following is to be said: "Light together with light."†

Then the grass, on fire, is to be carried around the pot three times as this rids the offering of the Rakshsa. This is done while saying: "Excluded is the race of the demons, excluded are the powers of adversity."†

The next step involves the pouring of water onto the milk. Once again we find ourselves with conflicting sources. On one hand water is never to be poured into the milk, else the glow of the milk is extinguished. To remove this obstacle, when the milking was performed some milk is to be left in the pail and water mixed with it. Then this mixture is poured onto the heated milk. However, as the milking pail is the pot this opens a puzzle of whether there two of the *sthali* (agnihotr pot)?

The other option is to pour water or no water at all. One pours water if they desire cattle. One does not pour on water if they desire splendour.

The next step is to remove the pot from the fire and ladle out the milk while standing. The milk pot should be removed from the fire very carefully. If it is taken off eastward the husband dies first, if to the west the wife dies first. Thus the pot should be removed to the north, ensuring old age together.

Another version is that if the pot is removed to the east the sacrificer will be met with grief. If the pot is taken off at the south the offering goes to the Fathers which is not favourable to the Gods. If it goes to the west grief befalls the sacrificer's wife. Thus the pot should be removed to the north.

The milk pot is to be set down near the fire as a means of worshipping the fire. The pot should not be laid to the south or behind the fire. It should be put at the west or north of the Householder's Fire while saying "Give me cattle."† The pot should not be placed by a fire which it is not intended to be offered to.

The way the milk is poured out into the Householder Fire is also complicated. One pours with a full ladle until each offering becomes smaller and smaller so his sons, according to their age, become prosperous. There is also the choice of offering a small amount first and then having the offering increase in size until a full ladle is the last offering. This leads to more food and the youngest son being the most prosperous.

There is the possibility of ladling out equal offerings so all the sons are treated equally. There is also a passage from the *Maitrayaisambita* (*Black Yajurveda*) which states a man who goes from ladling a larger offering to a smaller offering becomes inferior. Thus the man is to do smaller offerings that grow in size until the last offering is a full ladle.

Another version states that two ladles are used. These are purified by being heated and one ladle contains the milk and the other *ghee*. The *ghee* is poured out under the milk oblation. This is ladled out four times to obtain cattle (cattle having four legs). There is also mention of an *agnihtrasthali* which holds four ladles that is separate from the milk pot.

There is a version which states the first ladle represents the Full and New Moon sacrifices. The second ladle represents the four monthly sacrifices. The third ladle represents *istis* and *pasubandhas*. The fourth represents the tryambaka, the *vajapeya* and the *asvamedha* sacrifices.

An additional version says one should remove the milk pot to the north and place it down three times. The coals are then poked on the south side while saying: "Homage to the Gods."† The coals are carefully pushed back and then he ladles out four times and then/or an optional five times.

Yet another version, from the *Jaiminiyabrahmana* (*Samaveda*; 1,39) says:

"Then he takes off the milk and puts it down while saying: 'Established heaven, establish the world between heaven and earth, establish the earth, establish offspring and cattle for me, the sacrificer.' He pushes back the coals and says: 'You bring welfare, danger coming from foreign people has pushed you back.' Then he takes the dipping spoon and the offering spoon and purifies them by heating them over the fire while saying: 'Burnt is the race of the Rakshasa, burnt are the powers of adversity.' Then he rubs the offering spoon in the evening while saying: 'Together with the Gods coming in the evening' and in the morning he says: 'Together with the Gods in the morning.' 'Thee, the golden one, made of gold, I rub', 'Thou art the channel which conveys the oblations.' It becomes the channel for conveying oblations. Then he says: 'I shall ladle out.' He should speak: 'Yes, I shall send myself to heaven.'†

It is stated that the ladle being warm upsets Agni. As such the sacrificer should place the spoon in his hand or on his arm to cool it and make Agni happy.

The milk pot is then moved to be on the east of the Offeritorial Fire. This is accompanied by saying either "Give me life; give me glory; give me offspring,"† or "Give me life,"† or "Give me glory."† The kindling-stick is also laid down here and accompanied by: "The kindling-stick is indeed a man. He is kindled by food. Make me go to heaven by the energy of the food/oblation. Make my agnihotr go there where is the favourite domain of the Gods and the seers."†

The *Satapathabrahmana* (*White Yajurveda*) points out that the milk and kindling-stick should not be placed down until after the first offering.

Now we come to the offering within the Offeritorial Fire, which ends the ritual. The fire to which the offering is to be made must be of a particular design, meaning its appearance is to be exact.

The fire is broken into several stages in the *Taittiriyabrahmana* (*Black Yajurveda*). The first stage represents Vasus and is the very beginning, when the flames first smoke the fire is Rudra; when the flame seizes fuel for the first time it is the Adityas; when the fire flames on all sides it is all of the Gods, and when the flame is low and red it is Indra.

A gold coloured flame is sacred to Brhaspati, red is sacred to Varuna, neither gold or red is sacred to Mitra, and when the flame is engulfed in smoke it is sacred to all of the Gods. It is when the fire flickers that it is the mouth of Agni and the offering is to be made.

The morning offering should be made with the right foot in front. The evening offering is made with the right foot behind. The offering must be made on the kindling-stick. To do otherwise is to offer directly to Death.

The offering itself is tricky because the second offering should not be poured directly onto the first. To do so triggers a flaw in the ritual and thus Death. To avoid this it is said that the first oblation is poured onto one section of the kindling-stick and that the second is poured by “jumping over” the first offering. There is also mention of both offerings being in a single line, although the practicality of this would require more than one officiant or a special offering ladle.

“Earth, air, heaven”† should be said before offering.

The actions of the *agnihotr* differ depending on the source and the time of day. First let us look at the morning *agnihotr* and then the evening.

In the morning the offering is made while saying: “Surya is the light, the light is Surya.”†

In the evening the offering is made while saying: “In Agni be light, light in Agni.”† Or one can say: “Agni is the light, the light is Agni.”†

There are further variations for the morning and evening, but these are the most repeated.

At the completion of these offerings, additional actions may be performed that honour additional Gods. These offerings are made to Surya, Rudra, Indra, the Angirases, and even the Rakshasa to name a few. As we are dealing with just the *agnihotr* and not any acceptable additions we shall spend no further time here.

Questions In Regard To The *Agnihotr*

The Vedas also deal with questions that arose from the performing of the *agnihotr*. Once again there are not definite answers and some answers contain more detail than others.

If there is no lit fire from which to take fire from, the fire can be created from scratch as the need dictates.

It is stated that every man is to perform the *agnihotr*. Yet *Brahmins* can be found having other *Brahmins* perform it for them. This is a difficulty because the *agnihotr* has only one officiant, as the one symbolizes Prajapati in the original *agnihotr*.

A wonderful passage which points to others performing the *agnihotr* for you can be found in the *Sadvimsabrahmana* (4,1,13-14):

“One oblation performed by a pupil is better than a hundred oblations performed by others. One oblation performed by a son is better than a hundred oblations performed by pupils. One oblation performed by oneself is better than a hundred oblations performed by a son. For he should offer himself, he should milk himself, he should attend on the *agnihotr* himself.”†

In addition we have the problem that a man is to perform the Householder rituals when he is wed and a householder. So if he is not wed should he also not complete the *agnihotr*? The Vedas state that a man should perform the *agnihotr* regardless, otherwise he is a barbarian (a barbarian being a man who does not offer to men, the Fathers or the Gods).

The *agnihotr* is never to be performed for the *Ksatriya* (king & warrior class). It is thought that the practices of the *Ksatriya* make them impure. Instead to perform the *agnihotr* the *Ksatriya* family is to invite in a *Brahmin* and feed him, thus symbolically performing the *agnihotr*.

Another version states the *Ksatriya* may perform an *agnihotr* on New and Full moons and that the missing *agnihotrs* may be replaced by the *Ksatriya* reciting mantras every day or his family feeding a *Brahmin*. The *Brahmin* eats the food and thus a symbolic *agnihotr* is performed. This is because the *Brahmin* is the only person who can eat left over oblations and he is acting as the fire when he is fed.

A contradiction in actions, the *Kathakasambhita* (*Black Yajurveda*) and *Maitrayaisambhita* (*Black Yajurveda*) both state that the *agnihotr* is to be performed in silence while the milk is ladled out. While earlier certain phrases are found to be said during the ladling out of the milk.

Modern *Agnihotr*

Having covered the ancient *agnihotr* as much as we dare for these materials, we now step into the modern *agnihotr*. In order to create a modern *agnihotr* we have to dissect the ancient *agnihotr* and compare it with our modern world.

I would like to take a moment to talk briefly about the Hindu *agnihotr*, which has absolutely nothing to do with the Vedic *agnihotr* other than sharing the same name and involving a fire. The Hindu *agnihotr* fits within the Hindu cosmology and belief system. The Vedic *agnihotr* fits within the Vedic cosmology and belief system. If you are completing a Hindu *agnihotr* you are not doing the original ritual and,

contrary to propaganda, you are not doing a ritual that is the oldest ritual (the Hindu version, since Hinduism started about 200 BCE, is about 2200 years old).

The Vedic *agnibotr* is about honouring the gods and asking for blessings. The Hindu *agnibotr*, depending on your sources, is about purifying/healing the air and the earth or healing the self (and contrary to some sources, the *agnibotr* is not a *yajna* ritual). The tools used and the words said are entirely different and reflect the two belief systems respectively. The Vedic *agnibotr* is about the Gods. The Hindu *agnibotr* is about the inner self.

The differences are not a matter of doing things correctly or incorrectly (although completing rituals in an exact manner was very important to the Vedics). It is about honouring the Gods in a manner which pleases them. And as the Hindu religion has spent a millennia attempting to wipe out the Vedic Gods and the Hindu version is a tad too egocentric for my tastes, I prefer to complete the Vedic *agnibotr*.

The ancient *agnibotr* had two fires which it dealt with: the Offertorial Fire and the Householder's Fire. It can be safely assumed that outside of a temple a modern person is not going to have a constantly burning Offertorial Fire. A constant Householder's Fire can be arranged, but would take extreme caution. With today's family, pets and work load it is often not safe to have a constant fire burning.

So what is one to do in regards to the fire? To be honest, this would vary from family to family. In our own family we have a candle that was lit during our Vedic wedding ceremony (in ancient times the Householder's Fire was one lit during the wedding ceremony and then kept lit at the home). We are also blessed with a gas stove.

In our situation we light our Householder Fire (the candle) and transfer the fire to the gas stove, thus making it a functioning Householder's Fire. In addition there is a small bowl with coals for the fire to be moved to for the offerings. The Offertorial Fire is a second small bowl which contains coals that is lit as needed.

The ancient *agnibotr* had several tools which were peculiar to it. You had the cow, the ladle (or spoon) and the pot. Obviously not many people will have access to a cow so bottled milk will have to do. In addition not everyone has access to a ladle which has a handle an arm's length, nor do they have the skills or access to a clay pot made by hand (not on a potter's wheel) that can be used on a fire.

The ladle can be improvised and be a wooden spoon. However, the pottery simply cannot be made on a potter's wheel. To do so makes it no longer sacred for the Gods. We used a clay pot made by my own hands that was fired in a kiln.

You also have the kindling-stick, possible ghee, water and rice gruel. For kindling-sticks we use sandalwood, *ghee* we get at the local Indian market or make ourselves, for water we purchase bottled Ganges water although we do not use it in the *agnibotr* and we never bother with the rice. One of the most important items to have is a compass, so you know which direction is which! We also use a small refrigerator which holds all ritual related food products to avoid any contamination.

The next steps are to complete offerings into the Householder's Fire, move the offerings to the Offertorial Fire and then make the oblations to the Offertorial Fire. These things can easily be used as is for modern practitioners. The key is to choose which actions and phrases speak to you and aid in your connection with the Gods.

Agnibotr Ritual

The *agnibotr* is a ritual which I complete each day. If I am unable to perform it as I do not have access to certain items (due to travel) I do a modified version. This particular ritual was created for use by one individual and one that was required to be done indoors. This ritual assumes that you are standing and have the available tools and fires raised. It can easily be adapted for a seated ritual.

This ritual is done using a configuration of two small round tables with all items needed upon them. On one table the Offertorial Fire goes in the north and the Householder's Fire goes to the east. On the second table the milk, *sthali*, *ghee*, water, water ladle, milk ladle and *kusa* grass are laid out. You will also need oven mitts, a manner to light the Householder Fire, a small rake to push the coals, means for fires to exist and the containers to safely hold them (I line small bowls with dirt and place just a few coals in them). Most importantly, you will need a fire extinguisher. Do not ever do a ritual which uses fire without one.

You will notice that I have stripped away the asking for blessings from the Gods. The removal of asking for blessings was a personal choice because this ritual is done every day and I use it to honour the Gods and not ask for things. You will also notice that Vedic rituals contain more actions

than words. This ritual style may take some adjusting to if you are used to chanting mantras, or having a great deal of speech in your rituals.

One walks toward the fire containers from the south and stops just shy of them and states: “Agni is the light, the light is Agni” if it is in the evening or “Surya is the light, the light is Surya.” if it is in the morning. The Householder Fire is then lit and from this fire the Offertorial Fire is lit.

With a steady hand, the milk is transferred into the *stbali*. The *stbali* is then raised and held just slightly above the head while facing the north. A short bowing of the head is made to recognize the Fathers. Turning to the east the process of raising the *stbali* and bowing the head is repeated, but this time it is done to recognize the Gods.

The *stbali* is then carefully held in one hand as you ladle water out and pour it around the Householder’s Fire three times while reciting “I pour truth around you, Rta” if it is in the evening or “I pour Rta around you, truth.” if it is in the morning. You then pour water around the Offertorial Fire three times while reciting “I pour truth around you, Rta” if it is in the evening or “I pour Rta around you, truth” if it is in the morning. You then place the ladle down.

Then you push the coals of the Householder’s Fire to the north of the fire while saying: “You are the bringers of prosperity. Danger coming from abroad has now been pushed away.”

The *stbali* is then put onto the Householder’s Fire so that the milk may be cooked while saying: “You are now put on Vaisvanara’s fire. May Agni not burn your luster.” (You must keep a constant eye on the milk for it is to be cooked perfectly; it should not be luke warm and it should not boil).

Ghee is then sprinkled on the milk. This is followed by gathering some kusa grass and letting it be burned just enough so that a soft red glow is still upon it. Then you pass the *kusa* grass over the milk while saying: “Light together with light.”

The grass is then passed around the outside of the *stbali* three times while saying: “Excluded are the race of adversaries. Excluded are the powers of adversity.”

The *stbali* is then removed from the fire (please be careful to not be burned) and it must be removed to the north. The *stbali* is then placed to the west of the Householder’s Fire. A second ladle (different from that which you poured water from) is now used to pour four full ladlefuls of milk into the

Householder’s Fire.

Offerings are then ladled into the Offertorial Fire while saying: “Earth, Air, Heaven” before each offering. Additional offerings may be made to other Gods if one desires. Offerings are made until the *stbali* is empty.

When there are no more offerings one says: “Agni is the light, the light is Agni” if it is in the evening or “Surya is the light, the light is Surya.” if it is in the morning.

The fires are then put out with great care and then the ritual tools are cleaned and put away.



†Translations from *Daily Evening and Morning Offering Agnihotr According to the Brahmanas* by H. W. Bodewitz. Publisher: Brill Academic Pub. Published Date: 08/01/1997. ISBN: 9004045325

††*Yoni* did not mean womb. It meant “lair” or “abode”.

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Improving Dedicator Program Mentoring: The First Steps

by Michael J Dangler & Jennifer Hunt

As more and more ADF members are completing the Dedicator Program and, in turn, volunteering to mentor others, it is time to develop a program for training, assigning and communicating with volunteer mentors. At the moment, there are more people working on the DP than there are working as mentors, so that it often becomes overwhelming very quickly for the mentors. All too often, Dedicators don't receive the best possible support for their work. This isn't really anyone's fault, it's just happened.

Most often, the mentor or the Dedicator will start off well. Students move through a couple of requirements, working hard and (more importantly) working together. But often, something happens a few weeks into the process: something changes in the lives of the Dedicator and/or the mentor, and one or the other forgets to respond to an email. Maybe the mentor goes on vacation without telling the Dedicator. Soon the mentor and the Dedicator begin to fade from each others thoughts, and the mentorship gets left by the wayside.

This is what we hope to improve.

One problem is that there is a vast amount of work divided unevenly among a few individuals. While the current ADF Preceptor (Jennifer Hunt) and Deputy ADF Preceptor (me) are striving to delegate more of the mentoring to 26 volunteer mentors, much more that could be done. One of the most important parts of the Preceptor's job is to manage the ADF Dedicator Program, including reviewing DP submissions, and fielding questions and administrative matters, such as maintaining records and mailing DP certificates of completion – all of which takes on average, 10-15 hours a week, even when divided among two or three individuals.

Over the past six months, there has been an increase in requests for DP mentors. As such, we feel it is time to formalize some of the administration of the mentoring process, both in terms of administration and training.

Jenni has corresponded with each mentor to ensure she has up-to-date information for each mentor, and in January a new DP mentor e-list was created as a forum for communications among mentors.

Another issue is that there is no mentor training available. Each mentor has, of course, passed the Dedicator Program, but that doesn't necessarily prepare them for mentorship. This is something I believe we should work on at Wellspring this year: Jennifer Hunt and I are putting a workshop together to help train ADF's DP mentors to help them understand how to deal with their students better. It will be a learning experience for all of us, as Jenni and I are slowly uncovering the issues we need to address.

In the future, I would like to see us have a round-table and training session at the ADF Annual Meeting for all new DP mentors in which we find out what their respective strengths and weaknesses are, as well as their level of commitment, before we assign them students.

Another project that needs to be done, and something also in the works (hopefully to be ready by Wellspring), is a year-long series of lessons designed for those students who want more structure in their program. Each week, the mentor will mail his or her student a lesson, encouraging the student to ask questions and to do a bit of extra work to help the student along. Also included in this series of lessons will be a set of references, from back issues of *Oak Leaves* to publications by other well-respected scholars among ADF's members.

This particular set of lessons could also be adapted into weekly or monthly lessons for Groves to use. The span of one year will hopefully reduce the number of people who spend years on the DP because it doesn't have as much direction as it could.

It may sound ambitious, but as I very much think that this is a worthwhile project that ADF could really use, we're doing our best to make it available soon.



Heroic Women Warriors: Finding Them in the Strangest Places

by Michael J Dangler

I'm a video game player. I have been since I was allowed to buy my first Nintendo Entertainment System back in the early years of home game consoles. I remember unwrapping the packaging for the first time, pulling out the NES, the game controllers, and the PowerGun. Each item was like a new gift from above, and I knew I was one lucky kid, even though I wasn't the first person on the block to own one, and I had to share it with my younger brother.

My father always said that the Nintendo would never earn me useful skills, but he was wrong: it gave me two things: pixilated heroes that I could, in a sense, become as I controlled them; and a bank of information that might seem useless on the surface, but gives me a language with which to talk about some very profound ideas and experiences.

I was recently considering these electronic heroes of my youth, and how they profoundly affected the way I grew up and how my ideas of "heroic" were developed. Today, I look back on those days of the classic NES and realize just how important those games were.

One of the main heroes of my childhood was from a game called *Metroid*. I spent hours on this game, renting it over and over from the store. By the time I had finally stopped renting it, I expect I could have purchased the game brand new for the cost. The basic premise of the game was fairly simple and common: your hero, Samus Aran, wearing his protective suit that allows him to survive the atmosphere of this hostile planet and shoot up aliens, uses various puzzle-solving techniques, power-ups and a chunk of luck to get to the end, and there defeat the main boss, Mother Brain.

The description I've given is extremely simple. Suffice to say that I spent hours playing this game, and somewhere along the line, something happened to send shockwaves through the gaming community.

Samus Aran, the hero of many young boys, was a *girl*.

This was big, big news. In fact, there had never been a female character who could sell video games, especially without being in various states of undress for long periods of time. Girls in video games served secondary purposes, or else had seriously not-so-secondary topography that made them interesting. Girls told you what to do, provided heroes with secrets, and looked pretty. They were never heroes.

Now, though, there was a real female hero out there, one who was just as tough (if not tougher) than any male hero who had graced our television screens. She was resourceful, quick, and strong. She was, in the end, a positive female role model for young boys.

Wait, what does this have to do with ADF, hearth cultures, and real life? Are you already afraid that you missed a memo and *Oak Leaves* has turned into a magazine devoted to old-school gaming? Don't worry, you haven't.

What's important is that Samus Aran shows something to us all: there is a definite and strong need for good, strong female role models in our lives. Thousands of young boys found this out when Samus took off her helmet for the first time after they beat the game, even if none of us stopped to analyze this fact at the time. For a moment, these boys were able to look at a woman with real respect because they had constructed a mythic drama surrounding the game in which they had placed themselves inside the game as Samus.

I compared Samus with other women from history and myth that make good role models for boys and men of all ages, and I felt that really, these women are strong role models that males can identify with because they aren't common: they do what men wish they could do.

A great example is Boudicca, the flame-haired warrior who created alliances, defeated the elite IX Hispania Legio

under Cerialis (out of 6000 men, 500 cavalry is all that made it out alive), stormed a city or three, and allegedly took poison rather than be captured.¹ What man wouldn't want such a legacy? Great victories, powerful alliances, and defiance to the end: it's the kind of thing a man would like to think he would do in such situations.

Boudicca does not impress men because she was an equal of men, but because she seems to be "one of the guys." Interestingly, male historians tend to mention her gender in passing, while female historians tend to focus more on the fact that she was female. With male historians, the language is not of "she was a great woman," but "she was a great warrior." It's a broad generalization, for certain, but I think there's an element of wanting to identify with her, but not appear effeminate, and this causes the difference in terms.

Further study of Boudicca reveals sources that are not so flattering, though, and a good historian has to consider these as well. We find sources that speak very poorly of her, and we can't help but begin to wonder who is telling us the truth and who is lying for their own benefit. Roman historians talk of Boudicca, noting over and over again that she was female as if it were a weakness, but for some (such as Tacitus, who places a stirring speech on her lips) it is a proud thing, given that she has taken on an heroic presence, even (perhaps in spite of) being a woman.²

Brynhild in the *Volsungasaga* is another good example of an heroic woman that men can admire. . . and with her as well, we find that men are not meant to admire her for long.

Brynhild is a valkyrie, and the dragon-slayer, Sigurd, rides through the flames to claim her for his friend, and here Sigurd is the deceiver, a role that Brynhild will eventually take on herself, and which will lead to the death of the dragon-slayer. She is a source of wisdom and truth for Sigurd, teaching him runes and telling him such useful things as how to deal with drunk friends.

One very interesting thing about Brunhild is that until he removes her helmet, he believes she is a man, and the audience is meant to as well. With the removal of the helmet, though, she begins a slow descent into the characteristic woman of myth: deceitful and dangerous when crossed.

Though she insists to Sigurd that they are not meant to be together, he will hear none of it. "It is not fated that we should live together," she says. "I am a shield-maiden. I wear a helmet and ride with the warrior kings. I must support them, and I am not averse to fighting." She identifies herself as a man, and even describes women as false, saying, "It is wiser counsel not to put your trust in a woman, because women always break their promises."³

Maybe the implication is that men cannot generally handle strong women, or that we are afraid of them. All these heroes become less heroic though. Brynhild becomes the deceitful woman we often expect in myth; Boudicca, instead of defying the Romans with poison, dies of sickness running from them; and Samus (my poor Samus) ends up running around the hostile planet in what appears to be a one-piece bathing suit if you manage to beat the game quickly enough the first time around.

In the end, I encourage everyone to consider the women in your lives as strong heroes, not as objects that are deceitful and dangerous. There's plenty of evidence in the mythology for both, but honestly, we can choose whether we want to use a password to skip directly to the second mission in *Metroid* so we can get a pixilated eyeful of Samus Aran, or whether we'd rather see her as the hero we grew up loving. Women warriors and strong women are all around us: choose to view them that way. In the end, it's your mythic drama, not someone else's.



¹ Ellis, P.B. *Celtic Women: Women in Celtic Society and Literature*. ISBN: 0802838081

² Tacitus, *The Annals, Book XIV*, chapter 35.

³ Bycock, Jesse. *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. ISBN: 0520069048



Good Night, Sweet Child

by Narabali Agnayi

Toward the end of a trip to Austria (to start the reconstruction of the home we would be moving into) I found myself with quite the familiar feeling of sickness. In the first few moments I aligned it with some train sickness, but when it did not abate I knew it to be exactly what it was.

In our poor German we found a small shop selling assorted beauty supplies and we stopped in for a pregnancy test. Within the next hour we found that we were indeed expecting a sibling for our two year old son.

This news met us with a great deal of excitement. The previous year we had suffered a natural miscarriage at home when I was four months along. April 25th: it is a date forever impressed on my mind and one that lingers with each blessed moment I spend with my son.

There were no reasons given for the loss, and truth be told the medical professionals are as clueless as can be in regard to such things; although still quite kind in their absence of knowledge. Yet, even after being told repeatedly that they did not know why such a thing happened but nothing appeared to be wrong, I was greatly hesitant at trying for another child. I simply could not fathom how I would survive such a loss again.

This new child was a great joy for us. And yet, I was nervous. Then the bleeding started. There were a great many doctors appointments and there were declarations of pregnant and miscarried tossed around carelessly. We found that one day we were having a child, the next we were not and the day after we were.

Every night was met with tears and the realization that this was not meant to be. I do not think one can describe the pain and fear that came from watching the tiny heart beat on the ultrasound screen as a pool of blood seeped up around the small child that we had yet to name. I was at a loss to help, there was nothing I could do. We waited it out until I miscarried at home on December 19th, 2004 upon returning from my Grandfather-in-Law's funeral.

At the end of it all I performed a ritual for this child of mine. I created an image of them in sculpture, I gave a name to them and I placed the image upon a shrine; just as I had done for the child before. And when I complete the 88 temple pilgrimage on the island of Shikoku in Japan I will be making a stop to pray at every shrine of O-Jizo-san¹ that we pass.



Our Ritual For The Baby

As I began I made sure my shrine has a spot open to accept the sculpture I have made. I gathered my Vedic Householder's Fire; ghee (clarified butter); a ladle to pour ghee from, offerings of pure gold; kumkum²; a rake for the coals; a Brahmin's thread made by my own hand; a goat hand carved from wood³; a bowl of fresh water from the Danube river⁴ that has been mixed with fresh chopped mint leaves⁵; the photograph of the ultrasound picture in a frame to place beside the fire⁶; kusa grass⁷; and a small white cloth.

Due to the personal and emotional nature of this ritual I opted to use music created by another to tie everything together. My selected pieces were taken from the Gladiator movie soundtrack due to the wonderful composition of Hans Zimmer and Klaus Badelt and the hauntingly beautiful voice of Lisa Gerrard. The songs were: "Progeny", "The Wheat", "Sorrow", "Elysium", and "Now We Are Free".

Before the shrine on the ground, the fire was placed in the south with the remaining items laid out upon a vedi⁸ to the upper east of the fire. A small bed of kusa grass is placed to the right of the fire. Our small family was gathered with no processional and we began.

Brahmin⁹: (Adhvaryu⁹ makes offering of ghee to the fire) "We give honour to Yama, Vivasvan's son, with our oblations. Yama who travelled on to seek out a home for us beyond this life."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu makes an offering of ghee to the fire) "We call forth Yama, Agni and Vivasvan to sit beside us on this bed of sacred grass. Graciously look upon us with love and kindness."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu makes an offering of ghee to the fire) "May those who have attained the life of the spirits aid us and join us. Sit beside us, countless ancient Fathers, on this bed of sacred grass."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu places the Brahmin's thread around the sculpture and washes the sculpture with the cloth and water and then places a small dab of kumkum upon the forehead of the sculpture) "We ask that Agni, who devourers all things, heal the wound with which this child was inflicted."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu coats the sculpture in the fat) "We encompass you with fat to shield you from the hunger of Agni."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu pushes away the coals of the fire with the rake to make a spot for the sculpture to lay within the fire but not touched by it and then places the sculpture within it) "Agni let not your flames consume: do not burn the child up, do not let his body or skin be scattered.

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu places the wood goat within the flames) "Your offering is the goat, Agni. Allow your glowing splendor to take your offering with your fierce flames."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu pour an offering of ghee on the sculpture) "Surya receives your eye, the wind receives your spirit. Go forth into the waters, await us in the celestial sea. Make your home in the one which awaits us. Seek care in the Fathers while they care for you until we are reunited."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu makes an offering of gold to the fire) "When the child is ready, Yama, take them to the Heavens. Guide this child gentle past Sarama's¹⁰ offspring upon the path into the next life. Let Agni announce the oblations paid to the spirit followers of Rta and to the Devas. Let Vivasvan speak highly of them with their place in Heaven."

Brahmin: (Adhvaryu slowly pours water over the flames) "Cool, Agni, and let the spot where you have scorched and burnt be refreshed."

After cooling down the sculpture is placed upon the shrine.¹¹

The resources I used to create this ritual were the *Rgveda Sambhita* translation by Griffith, the *Rgveda Brahmanas* translation by Keith, the *Black Yajurveda* translation by Keith, the *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* by Macdonell and Keith.



1 O-Jizo-san is a Buddhist deity who looks after children who has passed on.

2 *Kumkum* is the red powder that makes up the circle worn on the forehead known as the *bindi*.

3 There are two takes on the inclusion of a goat within the funeral process. One is that the goat acts as a sacrifice so that Agni does not see the body as an offering. The second is that the goat is to led the deceased to the land of the ancestors. I have carved a goat from wood because we do not have a real goat to sacrifice.

4 We are moving to Austria in a location that is quite near the Danube. We have collected water from the Danube and found it personally fitting to use it in the bathing portion.

5 I have added the mint leaves for no religious reason. To be ever mindful (keeping in mind I am not likely to forget such a loss) I have chosen to attach a different scent to each child. Thus whenever I smell mint I would be given a pleasant memory of the love I have for this child.

6 We do not have the actual miscarriage tissue as it was sent for testing. Thus the ultrasound picture gives us something to focus upon.

7 *Kusa* grass is a sacred grass in the Vedas and is relatively easy to obtain. I do not know if it is what was used in funerals of old, but I chose to use it here.

8 The *vedi* is the place where all the ritual tools, and sometimes the offerings, are kept.

9 In our small family my husband takes on the role of the *Brahmin* and I the *Adhvaryu*. I complete all ritual action. My husband acts as the Brahmin to keep an eye on the ritual and he also takes the part of the Hotr by reciting (as we have no one to act within this capacity).

10 This refers to the parent of the dogs of Yama which guard the path to Heaven.

11 I have not decided yet what to do with the statues beyond this. Burial was not uncommon to the ancient Vedics but until I have secured our own funeral arrangements I shall continue to ponder.





The Wandering Druid

ADF Members' Tales From the Road

Venus of Willendorf

by N. Agnaya

I have been to Austria twice last year and twice this year (with a third journey back this November). I just cannot find enough information on Austria's fascinating pagan past and the various pagan customs that still continue to this day.

In July my family and I had gone to a sleepy town just forty-five minutes outside of Vienna to look at a home we wished to purchase. Stepping into it was quite literally stepping into my new home. This was the place I could see myself raising my children and caring for future grandchildren in.

We took the liberty of renting a car and traveling as far around the country side as we dared. We soon found ourselves in the famous Wachau region of Austria. The



In front of the small town of Willendorf



Large replica of the Venus of Willendorf

Danube powerfully pushed along and the beautiful mountains were decorated with shelf after shelf of vineyards.

We passed one small town after another: Krems, Melk, and Durnstein. We would occasionally pull into an entry way and leave the car to walk amongst the old pubs and churches upon the cobblestone streets.

It was not until our second trip in September that we decided to drive into Willendorf. We had incorrectly assumed that this town housed only a small museum and we had found our fill of museum hopping in Vienna.

We pulled the car up a narrow street and parked it along side a garden that was in full bloom. We wandered up to a display that told the story of the Venus, in German, and then we began the walk up the stone steps to the location where the Venus had been found.

The steps led up to a clear path of grass overlooking the splendor of the Wachau. To one side were various signs in English and German explaining the history as it was

known. To the other side was a steep drop onto a set of train tracks followed by an even steeper drop into the town of Willendorf. In the distance you could see the fog drenched Wachau mountains and the tree-lined Danube.

This was the exact area where the carving was found. Measuring at 4 3/8 inches, it was carved from oolitic limestone and is thought to be from 24,000 through 22,000 BCE. It was discovered in 1908 by the archaeologist Josef Szombathy.

The land here is unbelievably beautiful. The mountains rise up out of fields, of corn and sunflowers, as a swirl of green and castle ruins. The road side is decorated with various small town advertising the home-made wine that Austria is famous for. Train tracks duck in and out of the mountain sides as ferries transport people up and down the Danube.

It is not difficult to imagine the people who lived here once. Nor is it difficult to find a deep connection with this land. I have been to many places within North America, Europe and Asia, but it is here that I feel most connected.

Being where such a well known icon was found you can feel the excitement of that discovery and you can feel the connection to the past as it pulsates through you.

I feel very blessed and cannot believe that I will be living just an hour away from such a wonderful strip of land.



Path to the spot where the Venus was found



Making a Donation



Overlooking the Wachau



Living Our Druidry

Personal Experiences In The Practice Of Our Druidry

Unwanted Visitors

by Deilen Mor

I live in a townhouse community in Baltimore County 2 blocks from the city line. I have a small flower garden in the back yard that I like to work in when the weather and my time are optimal. There are a few small azalea bushes, a small red oak tree and various flowering plants.

I like to plant for scent as well as color. I found a small pewter bird bath that stands about 2 feet high and decided that it would be better for the actual bird food instead of water; considering the West Nile problems and all.

This made the birds happy as well as our felines. The cats like to lay on their window hammock and watch the goings on outside. This made me happy also. Then one day while looking outside, I saw a small nose peek out from below some ivy. I was not sure at first what it was so I waited. It appeared again. It seemed that some field mice moved into the garden. Ok, I thought, not a problem.

A day or so later, our neighbors on the left came knocking on the door. They are nice folks who also like to garden. Their backyard contains a plethora of hanging flowering baskets, rows of planted peas, tomatoes, zucchini and an assortment of herbs. Ok, so my garden needs work but that is not why they stopped by that day. They came by to inquire if we noticed the rat problem.

“Rats?” I said, “I have seen some small mice eating the remnants of left behind bird seed.”



“That is what we thought also until we saw mommy and daddy rat kill a dove in the backyard this morning.”

Hmmm, this was not good. The conversation continued with them saying that our rat problem needed to be taken care of so, do we poison them or call an exterminator? Well, I did not like the sound of that at all. Granted, rats are a serious problem but I do not like the idea of killing any creature. We discovered that they built a nest under the

fence between our townhouses. This was not a good thing,

What to do? What to do indeed!

The compromise was made that if they bought the poison or traps (not the glue kind), I would put them in the back yard and together we would dig out the nest.

I had a hard time sleeping that night. Rats are bad. They will attack children and pets and they potentially carry disease but I still just didn't like the idea of killing a creature. Also, what about the poison? Would a squirrel, bird or pet eat it? Would a small child wander into the yard and find the package? How would the poison affect the veggie garden? Ok, so maybe only a vegetarian would stress about the veggies.

I decided to call upon the gods for assistance in the matter.

The morning came and I did a meditation concentrating on the nature spirits and asking for guidance. I wrote down some ideas then out into the the drizzle I went armed with candles, incense and birdseed.

I stood on the stone path that borders our semi-circle garden and said, "Outsiders, Yes, you rats! It is to you that I speak. The 4 legged creatures that have invaded our space. You have brought death to the birds and your violent behaviour goes against the gentle nature of our garden. I give you this offering of bird seed and tell you to rid yourselves of this space." (Bird seed was sprinkled outside of the garden fence behind both townhomes.)

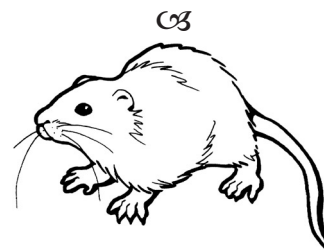
I walked back into the yard and stood once again on the path at the apex of the semi-circle. While lighting a candle for Bridget, I said, "Lady Bri, I ask your presence in this place. I call upon you as healer and wise woman. I ask that

you restore the health to our gardens. Let your snakes be a symbol of health and wisdom., if only for a short time, as they chase away the disease-carrying rats. I give you Eucalyptus incense." (I lit incense and placed the offering in three places in the garden amongst the flowers.) "Lady Bridget, be here now."

I then lit a Cernunnos candle. I said, "Cernunnos, lord of the forest and guardian of the creatures. I understand that all creatures have a place in the circle of life and I honor the spirits of nature." (I placed patchouli incense in three places in the garden). "The rats have come to claim their space amongst our families. They have stolen food, and brought death and violence to a place of beauty and peace. I ask that you guide them on their way to more feral grounds. Otherwise, may you bless them as they travel the path to the otherworld." (I placed traps under the tree and amongst the lettuce and peas.)

Standing at the entrance to the fence and gardens, I lit one last candle. "Manawyddan Ap Lyr, I ask your assistance. Hold this gateway to our homes secure. Bless this water that washes over this place and let not the unwanted enter here." (I planted the candle in the ground at the gate to the fence and allowed it to burn out by itself in the drizzling rain. The other candles were extinguished and brought inside.)

In the days that followed, there were no signs of rats, whether dead or alive. This made me very happy and all the traps were removed. However, my neighbors still think that I am strange for "praying" in the rain.



Oak Leaves



Your Article, Art Work Or Advertisement Could Have Been Here!

Oak Leaves accepts all sorts of materials on any subject related to the Indo-Europeans and Our Druidry. We look forward to receiving your poetry, stories, art work, rituals, travel stories and religious experiences. We also have a sizeable membership base of which would be glad to see your advertisement of your wares, services or events!

Please contact us for details: adf-chronicler@adf.org



The Solitary Path

News, Resources & Rituals For ADF's Solitary Members

Solitary Druid

by Joey Bernard

Welcome back to the Solitaries' Corner. The good folks here at Oak Leaves have decided to let me keep blathering on in a semi-permanent form here. This means that unless all of you out in the real-world (TM) don't start submitting articles to fill this space, then you will be forced to continue reading my little diatribes.

So you've decided to become a Druid, with all of the work that that entails. As a solitary, one of the biggest questions is, who do I tell? This is a question that I have no answer to. All I can do is bring up some points that should be thought about before disclosing your preferred religious beliefs to others. In this day and age, many people no longer practise their religion, let alone talk about it. So unless you bring the issue up, you probably will never need to come out of the broom closet, to steal a phrase from our Wiccan cousins.

But this can be a lonely proposition. It means not being able to share a part of your life that is likely one of the more important to you. You would likely want to share this with those closest to you. But how do you broach a subject that can be as thorny as religion? What do people say? "You can never discuss religion or politics. You can only argue." Religion forms the basis of a person's entire world-view. The way they see the entire rest of the universe is based on their religious views. This includes the lack of a religious view for atheists. They see the rest of the universe in their own way. You need to remember this vital fact. The second very important fact to remember is that people have an innate fear of the unknown. I'm sure this provided a great deal of evolutionary benefit to our ancestors, but I think that it is beginning to outlive its usefulness. These two issues can make it a very scary proposal to share your religion with others.

So you've decided to share; how best do you do this? The best place to start is by getting a feel for the other person's religious views first. Are they an atheist, a rabid evangelist, or somewhere in between? I can safely make

the assumption that they will be some stripe of Christian in North America, but they may belong to some other religion. What you really need to figure out is how open are they to the idea that they may be wrong? This is a big thing. Most people who have freely chosen their religious beliefs have looked around enough to know that no one knows all of the answers. And so, in general, they are usually more open to the idea that their beliefs are not infallible. That they may, in effect, be wrong. If they are of this type then you are probably on pretty safe ground discussing your own religion with them.

If, on the other hand, they have been bred and raised in their religion, they probably have never looked beyond it to see what else lies in the world. These types of people can be very difficult to share with. Some people will likely see the potential pitfalls here and decide not to pursue the matter with them. This may be a very legitimate decision to make at this point. The only person who can decide this is you. But let's assume that you think this person will be open to your religious views, and will also be open to discussing them. What next? The biggest step forward will likely be educational. This person may never have been exposed to other religious viewpoints, and so you may need to start with a crash course in comparative religions. But since you've finished the Dedicant Program, you already know all of that, right? (What you haven't finished it yet? That's OK. I haven't yet either, and yet they still let me blather on here. As if I know what I'm talking about.)

This will likely help them overcome the fear of the unknown that we spoke about. Once they've gotten over the idea that there may be more than one valid religion out there, they may be more open to the idea of a pagan religion. This is different than being open to the idea of someone they know and care about BEING pagan. This is a separate hurdle to get over than the one about exposing them to alternative religions. And as before, you may not be able to get over this hurdle with this

particular person at this time. If so, then you need to respect that and perhaps try again when you feel the person may be more open. They may simply need time to digest the concept of other religions before they're ready to accept a real live breathing pagan.

I've placed a lot of conditionals, ifs, and maybes in this short article. This is very much on purpose. You may be potentially shattering another person's belief system by forcing them to acknowledge your own. This can cause rifts in friendships that may never heal. Whenever you deal with such delicate things as a person's deepest beliefs, you need to show the utmost care and respect. You also need to have the patience and understanding to realize how much a person is willing to accept, and how much is too much for right now. If you do this, then

you too can have a muggle friend who is open to talking with you about what goes on in the larger world. And if not, you may still have helped open that person's eyes to another part of the world around them. And if you're really lucky, they may have shown you something about your world you didn't even realize was there. Just like locals in a town who never go to the attractions, you may go and visit them in order to show your friends, and you may discover even more wonders in your own backyard.

In the next instalment, I think I'll start going over the Dedicator's Program from a solitary point of view. I know the Dedicator Program has been covered elsewhere in Oak Leaves, but I think that there are special issues specific to solitaries. And besides, it will force me to finish my Dedicator Program, finally. Next issue, same Bat-Time, same Bat-Channel.



Attention all Artists! **ADF has issued you a Challenge!**



Within each issue we will send out a word, an idea, a vision for you to explore through photography, sculpture, poetry, jewelry, song, wood carving, fabric or any artistic medium that you can come up with! Challenges will appear within the pages of Oak Leaves. You will have three months to complete each challenge.

Send in a text document, a scan or a photograph of your work to the Oak Leaves Art Director at Vedis_jansdottir@mchsi.com. Please include your name, e-mail address, dimensions of the piece, title, media, and your web site if you have one.

Submissions will be judged by the Oak Leaves Staff based on each submission's relativity to the Challenge, artistic merit, appropriateness for print in a publication, cultural accuracy, and creativity. One First Prize and two Honourable Mentions will be selected. The First Prize recipient will be featured in a future issue of Oak Leaves in an article showcasing them and their art. Honourable Mentions will have their work shown in a future issue of Oak Leaves.

**The Current Challenge Is:
The Ancestors and/or Death**

**The Challenge Deadline Is:
July 1st, 2005**

The Challenge is open to all. You do not need to be a member of a Guild or ADF to enter your submission. One submission per individual please.

Little Acorns

Old Oak Spirit in Winter

by Natalie Erin Smith
aka. Lady DragonStar



It was a crisp winter's day outside and the newly fallen snow lay thick across the land; as thick as the soft down quilt that Mommy had made to keep two little boys warm at night. Right now, however, those two little boys were busy peering out the frosty window at the snow covered yard and the edge of the woods beyond. Their thoughts were filled with the sparkling, glittery snow and the urge to run outside and play.

"Mommy," piped up little Collin, the older of the two boys, "it's stopped snowing, can we go outside now, please?"

"Can we, can we, please, please?" begged little brother Aidan.

"Mmm," said Mommy, "Ok, but you have to put on your warm coats and hats first."

So out into the snow they went. After a few minutes of playing, Aidan had a thought. "Aren't those trees cold?" he asked his big brother. "They don't have leaves to keep them warm."

"You know, I'm not sure," said Collin. "I think that would be a good question to ask the old Oak Tree Spirit. Let's go to the grove and ask him."

"Yeah!" shouted Aidan, and, after they let their mother know where they were going, they set off into the woods,

feeling the snow go *crunch, crunch* under their feet.

It wasn't long before they came to a clearing in the woods ringed by large old trees. In the center of the opening, all off to itself, stood a tall, old oak tree, the tallest in the forest. This was the guardian tree of the grove.

At the base of the tree, between two mighty roots, there was an opening in the tree. This was the doorway to Oak Spirit's home.

Collin knocked on the trunk. "Hello, are you in there?"

After a few moments, they heard, "I'm coming, I'm coming," and then out came a strange looking little man. He was very small, about a foot tall (quite tall as far as tree spirits go, he liked to say). His hair and beard looked like lichen, and his skin looked like bark, he was wearing a suit of dried leaves and was wrapped in a cloak of woven moss.

"Awfully cold out for you little acorns to be wandering about in the woods," he said with a gruff little voice. "What brought you out here to call me away from my cozy hearth?"

"Well, we were wondering," little Aidan said, "I mean aren't the trees cold? Why do they get undressed for winter, when we've got to bundle up?"

"Oh, now that's a good question," Oak Spirit replied. "You see, winter is the time for us all to go back to our roots. You do that by spending more time with your family and friends, sitting around a cozy fire and telling stories. Trees quite frankly return to their roots, sending their energy deep into their roots to help keep them warm, and their shed leaves make a blanket on the ground to keep the earth warm and give food to the soil."

“And the plants and the trees get the food from the soil!” cried Collin.

“That’s right. Many animals, like rabbits, foxes and squirrels spend the winter close with their families, too,” said the Oak Spirit.

“But what about trees like the cedars and pines?” asked Aidan. “They stay green all winter.”

“They stay green to remind us all that even in the coldest night of winter, there is the promise of Spring.”

“Oooh! Oooh! I see some green up in the oak tree!” said Collin, jumping up and down. “What’s that?”

“That’s mistletoe,” smiled the Oak Spirit. “The faerie guards sit in the mistletoe to watch for the first Spring sunrise.”

“Oh, cool!” said Collin.

“Collin! Aidan!” came Mommy’s voice from the distance. “It’s time for supper!”

“We’ve got to go,” said Aidan. “Thank you, Oak Spirit, bye bye!”

“Bye Oak Spirit!” said Collin, waving as they walked back to the house to enjoy a warm winter stew.





Reviews

The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British

Isles: Their Nature and Legacy

by Prof. Ronald Hutton

ISBN 0631172882

List Price \$29.95

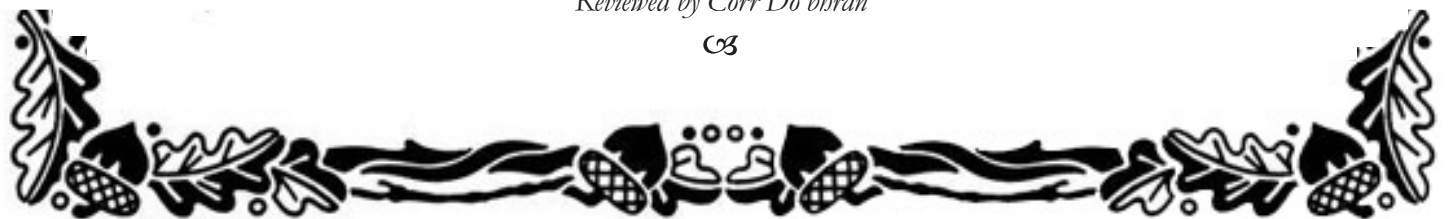
Today, I am writing about a book titled *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* by Prof. Ronald Hutton, which is published by Blackwell Publishers Inc. Ronald Hutton was educated first at Cambridge and then at Oxford University, where he had a fellowship at Magdalen College. In 1981, he moved to the University of Bristol, where he is now reader of British history. He is a historian of wide interest ranging from politics to topics covering the whole of Britain. Other books he has written include *Charles II: King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, The Restoration*, and *The Ritual Year: The Stations of the Sun*.

When Hutton set out to write this book, he wished to convey what is presently known about the religious beliefs and practices of the inhabitants of the British Isles before the conversion to Christianity. In light of the large amount of new evidence and ideas relating to the subject that have been published in the last two decades; much of which seems to be only known to experts in a narrow area of study; the text covers a wide time span starting in the Old Stone Age and going on through the coming of Christianity which is used to challenge many beliefs about the Celts, which were based on work that was done decades earlier. Much of the information that he used was from the field of archaeology and then drew conclusions based on the evidence to dismiss old stereotypes from modern Occult and Pagan sources.

The text starts with the Old Stone Age with female dolls and tombs and as the text continues on, it covers changes in the archeological record while he goes through the Neolithic with stone circles, the Bronze Age and its economic drop, the Iron Age with the current view with “Celtic” culture, and finally the Roman occupation leading to the conversion of the Islands to Christianity. The last chapter of the text is an overview of the events of religion and Paganism throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern times. Other things Hutton does is takes many of the myths about the Celts dealing with Ley Lines, dragons, and Atlantis that are believed to have occurred during the Bronze Age and makes it clear that that is not the origins of these views and shows where the myths come from.

I absolutely enjoyed this book, even though it was hard to follow at times. It is highly technically written and in places very long-winded. However, what Hutton did was something that one doesn't see in other text about the Celts, represent them as a tribal society and not this unified culture like others would have. Hutton also took other New Age myths and went through them. I found it very interesting that the concept of Ley Lines originated with the Chinese and was not a Celtic mystical view. The only real complaint I have about the book other than the long-windedness is that he was understandably overly critical of some authors such as Caitlin Matthews and a little bit with Miranda Green.

Reviewed by Corr Do'bhran





Festivals & Festival Reviews

Walking With Fire 2004

by Michael J Dangler

Many times this year, I've reviewed festivals that have set new standards for hospitality. Over and over again, the Groves and leaders of ADF have proven themselves second to none in this particular aspect of Our Druidry, and Walking With Fire was no exception. Narabali and Ratrija are superb hosts, and we, as their guests, wanted for nothing. I was amazed at the house that was rented for this conference, alone high in the Catskill Mountains, and the stream that ran through the back between the house and the pool was beautiful to see. Keeping with the feel of an intimate gathering, the number of attendees was purposefully low, encouraging us to all get to know each other. As we settled into the long weekend, we found that we had a lot in common.

Having never learned much about Vedism, I was struck by the amount of material that was presented in the various workshops. Adhitin Ratrija presented a (fast moving) DVD of his trip to India with Narabali, and we saw many of the temples and a good chunk of statuary (including a bit of vaguely pornographic stuff). Sanskrit, the significance of food and drink in IE cultures, and Slavic magic and divination were just a few of the other great workshops that filled out the presentations.

Going on to more intriguing things, though, the best thing was probably the shadow-puppet show on Saturday night. Retreating behind the big white sheet, I got to help put the play on with Monika and Alice, with Ratrija doing the voice-overs. Everything went well for a while, until the puppeteers got a bit lost in the script, but it still looked excellent. Afterwards, I was able to watch a video of the performance, and I was amazed at how good it looked. The best part, though, was how much fun both the performers and the audience had.



The home where Walking With Fire was hosted in 2004.

Times like these are what our fellowship is built on. I had a lot of fun, and I very much must admit that this was a crowning event for a wonderful festival season that started with Trillium last April. The weekend ended much as it had begun, with hugs all around and cheerful smiles, because we all knew that it had been a unique weekend that we would all love to repeat next year. So who's going to Austria with me next year for the second installment of this wonderful festival?



Michael J Dangler giving a workshop on play in ritual at Walking With Fire (2004).



Walking With Fire 2004

by Jude Howison

Our trip began on a crisp dark October morning. We left home at 4 am and headed for New York via Canada. Our choice of a northern route was a good one as the roads were uncrowded and the scenery was beautiful. As we drove along, my mind was occupied with thoughts of the conference ahead. I had met most of the folks before and I hoped to meet some new friends as well.

Fourteen hours later we were winding our way up a steep and narrow country road. I peered through the gathering darkness and before long spied the bright balloons Narabali had promised to place at the end of the driveway. The house had a warm glow and I felt welcome already. I could see Ratrija's unmistakable tall blonde form through the windows of the entryway. Narabali, Ratrija, Skip and Francesca were already there and a welcoming meal was cooking in the kitchen. We were joined a bit later by Michael, Monika and Steph. Hugs and warm welcomes were exchanged and the rest of the evening was spent in pleasant company.

As Saturday morning dawned I was able to see more of the house and grounds. The house we were using is called Streamside. It was built beside a beautiful stream with smooth shiny stones, miniature waterfalls and small pools. It was a wonderful little pool that called to Skip. In spite of the chilly air, he could not resist at least a short skinny dip. He even managed to convince Monika and Steph to try the water as well (although they chose to wear their bathing suits). I also found that we had been joined during the night by our final two members, Alice and Cal. Although we had not met before, we soon found much in common.

The workshops were the backbone of the weekend. They were diverse but focused. Narabali and Ratrija showed several videos of India, one of which was a Vedic Ritual that may never be performed again. There were workshops on food and drink, magic and a shadow puppet performance. My favorite workshop though was on Sanskrit. I am attempting to learn Sanskrit as my I.E.



Jude Howison assisting the making of the feast at Walking With Fire (2004).

language for the ADF Generalist Study Program and I had been looking forward to this workshop for weeks.

Although Sanskrit was my favorite workshop, I feel the high point of the weekend was the Ancestor's Supper on Sunday evening. During the meal of scrumptious food, no one could speak unless they were telling a story about an ancestor. The tales told were interesting, funny, sad and touching. During the supper I felt very close to our little group.



Walking With Fire 2004

by Narabali Agnayi

I have been to quite a few festivals over the years. I have learned many things from them, I have met some wonderful people at them, and they have been enjoyable. Yet, I never felt as if I related entirely to my fellow ADFers as I sat down to hear a workshop on runes or attend a ritual to honour Celtic deities. While these subjects are interesting and informative, I had to wonder where the talks on the ritual fire were, where were the rituals for



The shadow puppet show. A Brahmin is saying a funeral hymn over Yama.

Vac and Yama? Sure, people were worshiping Hindu gods, but since these people are trying to erase my Gods I did not want part of it.

A few years ago my husband and I set out to give a few workshops on our own religious culture. We found that there was indeed an interest in this information, albeit most of it was from a few individuals. But even if only one person wants to know, I felt it was important to talk about it and to share what we could.

Knowing that we could not possibly travel to every festival to represent our religion, we decided to test the waters and start an event: Walking With Fire. We hoped that it would get people excited about the Eastern Indo-Europeans, that it will start people to asking their local events for workshops and rituals on these topics. Personally, we found that there is so much incorrect information on just Vedism that we believe it calls for more presentations on any Eastern Indo-European subject.

With that in our head we set out to host a small event where we could create a friendly environment that fostered fellowship and the sharing of this information. I think that we succeeded and then some.

Walking With Fire of 2004 was held in the Catskill mountain region of New York. It started on a Friday evening and ended on Monday morning with breakfast. Friday evening was met with all of our attendees arriving and a wonderful warm dinner which I prepared. There were many hugs, stories shared of the journey and wonderful conversation filled with laughter that evening.

Saturday was filled with swimming in the creek, hot tubbing and a wonderful Indian feast followed by a shadow puppet show. The shadow puppet show was one of the highlights for me. I wrote the script using various hymns from the Rgveda.

The performance was split into three acts and accompanied by hand selected music. While the puppeteers wielded their traditional Balinese and Indian puppets like pros, Ratrija recited the stories of Prajapati and the first agnihotr, the death of Yama, the battle between Indra and Vrtra and the wedding of Surya.

Sunday contained more hot tubbing and wonderful workshops. The workshops at this event were extremely varied and contained something for everyone. Sunday night ended with a Slavic feast which had our attendees sharing stories of their ancestors. The tales ranged from those which made them laugh, those that made them cry and those that made them feel pride to be decedents of the honoured dead.

Monday morning had us saying our farewells and pawn-ing off the overflow of food. As I hugged everyone good bye I found I really wish this had been a week long event. One where I could have spent more time with everyone and enjoyed another ritual or two.



The shadow puppet show. Indra is attacking Vrtra.

Overall, I quite enjoyed my time at Walking With Fire. My favourite memories are of Steph and Jude helping me to make the meal on Saturday evening as we tried to figure out the food processor and then trying to cook fish kebobs over a grill without them falling off the stick. Watching the hands of Mike, Monika and Alice on the shadow puppet screen. Eating the wonderful food made by Francesca (yum, yum!). And after the event my asking the Gods on October 18th if they wanted us to host another conference in 2005 that they needed to make the Red Sox win the game that night (which they did and then some). Mostly, enjoying the company of the wonderful group I am happy to call family made everything just perfect.

Having hosted my first event, I have learned some things. Looking back, even though it was a small event, I do not believe I was able to spend as much time socializing as I would have liked. I believe the schedule was a tad too cramped and that is a lesson I am taking to heart. Preparing the meals was a large task and I am more likely to call out for pizza next time!

As Walking With Fire was a very successful event we have decided we will be hosting it again in 2005. As we are moving to Austria we chose to host the event in our new own home in Hollabrunn, Austria. It will be held over the United States' Thanksgiving break of November 22nd through the 27th, 2005. We hope by hosting it



The meal left for the ancestors. on Sunday night at Walking With Fire (2004)

during a holiday that more ADF members from the United States can attend. Naturally, we look forward to seeing as many of ADF's European members as possible and we also hope to see some Canadian members as well!

While plans are tentative at this stage, the event is free to attend (just as it was in 2004), most meals will be included, the time will be split between workshops and sightseeing, and accommodations are also provided if you chose to stay with us in our large home.

Presenters are to include Rev. Skip Ellison and Ratrija. The sightseeing will encompass the Wachau area and Vienna. We also hope to have our temple completed. It is sure to be a once in a life time opportunity with a chance to learn more about ADF, the Eastern Indo-Europeans



Rev. Skip Ellison taking a dip in the stream at Walking With Fire (2004).

and your fellow members of ADF.

Walking With Fire was a splendid event that helped to share the cultures of the Eastern Indo-Europeans through workshops and rituals. I hope that you will give thought to joining us for another fantastic Walking With Fire in 2005. The shadow puppet show is worth it, believe me!

For more information please see our web site at:

<http://www.walkingwithfire.org>

Please feel free to e-mail us at:

contact@walkingwithfire.info



ADF Festivals

WinterStar Symposium

When: February 26 - 29, 2004

Where: Atwood Lake Resort, Dellroy, OH

Organizers: ACE (with StoneCreed Grove, ADF)

Contact: webchameleon2@rosencomet.com

Website: <http://www.rosencomet.com/winterstar/>

Trillium Spring Gathering

When: April 21 - 24, 2005

Where: The Log Cabin Campground, Cross Junction, VA

Organizers: Little Acorn Grove, ADF

Contact: seabhacfionn@comcast.net

Website: <http://www.littleacorngrove.org/trillium/>

Desert Magic Festival

When: May 5 - 8, 2005

Where: Summerlands Stone Circle, Tucson, AZ

Organizers: Sonoran Sunrise Grove, ADF

Contact: druidkirk@direcway.com

Website: <http://www.ssg-adf.org/desertmagic.htm>

The Wellspring Gathering: ADF National Meeting

When: May 27 - 30, 2005

Where: Brushwood Folklore Center, Sherman, NY

Organizers: StoneCreed Grove, ADF (and the Mother Grove)

Contact: StoneCreed Grove, ADF

Website: <http://www.stonecreed.org/wellspring/>

Starwood Festival

When: July 19 - 24, 2005

Where: Brushwood Folklore Center, Sherman, NY

Organizers: ACE (with StoneCreed Grove, ADF)

Contact: webchameleon2@rosencomet.com

Website: <http://www.rosencomet.com/starwood/>

Summerland Gathering

When: August 26 - 28, 2005 (tentative)

Where: Yellow Springs, OH

Organizers: The 6th Night Grove, ADF

Contact: 6thnight@6thnight.org

Website: <http://www.6thnight.org/Summerland>

Fall Festival & Druid Gathering

When: September 15-18, 2005

Where: Four Quarters Farm, Artemis, PA

Organizers: Red Oak Grove, ADF

Contact: officers@redoakgrove.org

Website: <http://www.redoakgrove.org/fallfest/>

Three Realms: A Pacific Druid Festival

When: October 6 - 9, 2005 (tentative)

Where: Sage Hill Campground, Santa Barbara, CA

Organizers: Raven's Cry Grove, ADF

Contact: ThreeRealms@ravenscrygrove.org

Website: <http://ravenscrygrove.org/3realms.htm>

Walking With Fire: An Eastern Indo-European Conference

When: November 22 - 27, 2005

Where: Vienna, Austria

Organizers: Eastern Gate and Slavic Kins, ADF

Contact: ratrija@perfumescorpion.org

Website: <http://www.walkingwithfire.org/>





Falling Acorns

Announcements

Dedicant Program

Congratulations to the new Dedicants!

Lori Collner of Three Cranes Grove, completed August 1, 2004.

Eva Gordon of Raven's Cry Grove, completed October 5, 2004

New Protogroves

Whispering Well Protogrove, Airway Heights, Washington, founded October 13, 2004.

Guild Reports

Dance Guild

13 active members, 0 inactive/lapsed, 3 new members

The past three months have brought us three new members and a new, official ADF list. You may join the list at <http://www.adf.org/members/forums/subscribe.html>

We also have our own little corner of the ADF website, located at <http://www.adf.org/members/guilds/dance/>. If you have suggestions for things that should go on the website, such as a recommended reading list, recommended links, etc, please let the Dance Guild Scribe know. He can be emailed at dangler.8@osu.edu

I should also note that we are halfway through our first year as a Guild, and we made some plans and promises early on. Plans for the Guild in this year are:

- 1) Better define ourselves and what the Guild will cover.
- 2) Begin work on a Guild Study program.
- 3) Begin to produce some training materials.
- 4) Tap the Guild members for workshops to be given at festivals.
- 5) Develop a five year plan for the Guild to facilitate

One festival, Trillium, has already requested workshop presenters from the Guild. Hopefully, we will be able to find someone who is able to present at this festival, because we would like to be known for providing quality workshops and training (so if anyone in the Guild would like to present, please get with the organizers of that festival!).

Over the next few months, I plan to post these questions for discussion on our mailing list. Hopefully, we will be able to have these items either in progress or out of the way before August 1, 2005, which will mark one year of reports (though our anniversary date will be in May).

Nechochwen,
Michael J Dangler
Dance Guild Scribe

Rin Reports

Aus Dhwer, Eastern Indo-European Kin

We co-hosted the Eastern Indo-European Conference, Walking With Fire, this October. It was a success all the way around. We will be hosting another conference next year just outside of Vienna, Austria. Presenters include myself and Rev. Skip Ellison. We are very excited about this and look forward to seeing as many interested individuals as possible. You may find out additional information by visiting the following web site:

<http://www.walkingwithfire.org>

We have been providing submissions for Oak Leaves to further the understanding of the Eastern Indo-Europeans and we look forward to additional materials appearing in future Oak Leaves.

Adhitin Ratrija,
Director
ratrija@perfumedscorpion.org

Crossword Puzzle

Children's Winter Puzzle (Ages 8+)

Across

2. This Yule plant was usually hung above the door.

4. The noble class used this item as a table center piece in the middle ages.

7. He's a jolly old soul.

8. These branches were/ are used to decorate the home?

10. This Yule decoration usually hangs on your door.

12. Ancient Roman traditional gift.

14. This was a sacred plant to the ancient Druids.

16. A long time holiday tradition.

17. These are usually found under the tree?

20. The shortest day of the year?

20. The shortest day of the year?

Down

1. The Roman Yule time holiday ?

3. An old fireplace tradition.

5. Frozen water.

6. Yules Month.

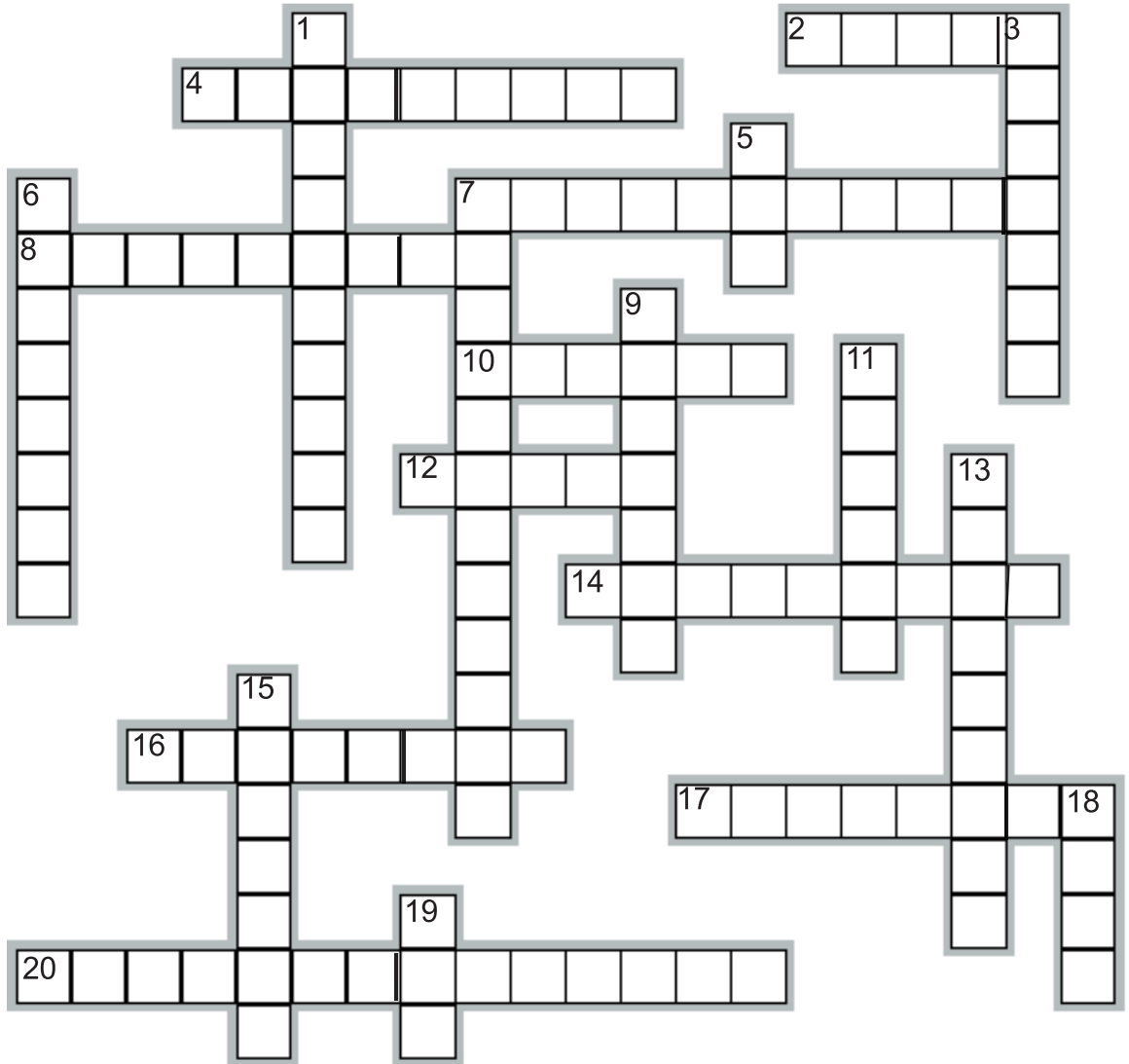
7. A Fun winter sport.

9. A traditional Yuletide cider.

11. A winter sport played on ice.

13. These are usually hung on the hearth.

15. _____ were used for both decorations and gifts in ancient times.



Down continued

18. Ice crystals.

19. Nordic name for Yule.

Answers to the Crossword appearing in issue 26 of Oak Leaves may be found on page 44 of this publication.

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Bottom left corner of page 35 photo supplied by Rev. Skip Ellison

Image of Rev. Skip Ellison on Page 2 graciously supplied by Sonoran Sunrise Grove.

submission guidelines

Oak Leaves seeks to provide a forum of sharing, learning and community growth through the content within its pages. You can help by submitting your articles, essays, art work, poetry, recipes, travel stories, reviews, thoughts, rituals, and announcements. Oak Leaves welcomes submissions from both non-members and members of ADF. Submissions may be sent to: Oak Leaves Submission c/o ADF, P.O. Box 17874, Tucson, AZ 85731-7874 or as attachments to: oak-leaves@adf.org. Submitted materials will not be returned to the sender. Oak Leaves cannot be responsible for manuscripts, photographs and art works. The content of all submitted material remains the property of the author/artist. Copyrights should be respected, and articles should not be reprinted without express permission from the author. All opinions expressed in Oak Leaves are those of the authors, and not necessarily of ADF.

Deadlines for submissions are:

Spring: January 1st

Summer: April 1st

Autumn: July 1st

Winter: October 1st

Answers For Crossword Puzzle In Issue 26:

Across

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 2. Horse | 16. One |
| 6. Place | 18. Worth |
| 7. Smoke | 22. Kidding |
| 8. Inch | 24. Gold |
| 10. Real | 25. Straw |
| 12. Fantastic | 28. Long |
| 14. Cream | 29. Dogs |
| 15. Hazy | 30. Born |
| | 31. Throw |

Down

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. Years | 17. Kit |
| 3. Open | 19. Right |
| 4. Piper | 20. Together |
| 5. Another | 21. Tomorrow |
| 6. Pen | 23. Green |
| 9. Cart | 26. West |
| 11. Indeed | 27. Crow |
| 13. Chew | 28. Line |

Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship

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I am 18 years of Age or Older: Yes No (Check one)

To whom it may concern: (enter child's name here) _____ has my permission to become a member of ADF, and I am fully aware of the Neopagan nature of this organization.

Parent/Guardian's signed name: _____ Parent/Guardian's printed name: _____

Notary Seal :

This form may also be found online at: <http://www.adf.org/joining/join.html>



Arjuna